

SAINTE-COLLINE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Clochemerle

GABRIEL CHEVALLIER

Sainte-Colline

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CHAP. I: THE COLLEGIANS REASSEMBLE

It was the 3rd October 1912, at about four o'clock in the afternoon of a cold and misty day which already held threat of a depressing twilight to follow. Two trains came to a halt almost simultaneously in Valmonciel station. Emerging from these might have been seen a number of schoolboys in uniform, their ages varying from eight to eighteen years; the majority being accompanied by their parents, especially the younger boys, whose appearance in some cases betrayed apprehension not unmingled with tears. Without exception they wore the short-peaked cap with purple band by which "the pupils of the Fathers" could be distinguished at a glance from those of secular establishments.

Hustling and pushing aside parents and pupils alike, a collection of young scamps, each one smoking a cigarette, and rendered conspicuous by a peculiar fashion of rumpling his too luxuriant hair and brushing it in a coil around his head, dashed forward with loud cries. It should here be stated that these boys belonged to the tribe of the *Malgaches*, a kind of secret society, much addicted to hair-pulling, giving of blows, lying, and trickery in general, which indulged in a reign of terror over the spies and sneaks and the weaker members of the community. Had you been passing that way you would have recognized, in that doughty company, some of the more famous of the "bloods," namely the tall Soufflay, Dominique Issartier, Jean Louis Laguinche (brother of Edmond, a pupil in the fifth form), Maréchalais, Pascalon, Guitou, Noel Cacia, Trouche, and Zimopino.

These were the boys who constituted the high and mighty, the shining lights in rhetoric and philosophy, and it was they who were now rushing pell-mell into the town in search of such virile pleasures as they might enjoy during the period of freedom which still remained before the evening bell. This much is certain, that they were returning from their holidays with a rich harvest of experience, of quite wonderful experience; for these boys who

had only lately acquired that arrogance which serves as cloak for the shyness and diffidence of boyhood were beginning to take notice of women and discussed them freely. There were some who even boasted of having caressed them. ("Yes, m'lad, all I can tell you is, they make you feel absolutely slap-up, women do, you'd never believe it. But they're not for little sissies like you!") Zinopino in particular was said to have had an affair with a certain person whose charms were not only spectacular but also immensely in vogue. This specimen of depravity, setting aside her usual clients, became infatuated with a boy of sixteen, whose moral corruption she proceeded to take in hand with frightful thoroughness. The intervention of his family, with accompanying threats, became necessary before she would let him go. It made a whole story and a highly scandalous one, and for long after the details were discussed in whispers, accompanied by delicious thrills, in every nook and corner of the College. And in the senior dormitory, visions of that brazen hussy, that Messalina, that devourer of tender flesh, the creature whose whispered name was "Zinopino's tart," would come to haunt certain restless boys whose musings brought them heavy-lidded eyes and an appearance of mesmerism.

As for Zinopino, the hero of this legend (which had probably been embellished), he was a dark-haired, stocky youth, over-developed, and the hair which sprang from every portion of his frame with prodigious fertility, covered his whole body in a rich blossoming, bluish-black in colour. In the swimming-bath he was an object of curiosity. From the whole region of the groin aggressive tufts, stiffer than horsehair, were seen to sprout; these continued up to his chest, burgeoned over the pectorals, and stood out in little curls at nearly an inch from the skin at every point. His eyebrows, which were very thick, met at the bridge of his nose and extended down the bone to where the cartilage begins. His hair, at the temples, joined the eyebrows. And his moustache, which was already faintly outlined, together with his full, richly coloured lips which were so striking a feature, lent to this young countenance a character which was embarrassing, but in some strange way attractive. And it cannot be denied that there were occasions when full-grown women thrilled at the

sight of this youth, who derived from the buffalo and the gorilla, and gazed at him in fascination, with secret hopes of emotions strange and unknown. Every pupil in the College foresaw to some extent that Zinopino was destined to exercise a peculiar authority, for he alone among them all enjoyed that most striking, most envied form of prestige, that of being able, at the age of sixteen, to interest the other sex.

The tall Soufflay was looked upon as the champion of all oddities—a distinction much to be envied. He was awkward and ungainly, absent-minded and full of eccentric whims, with unbelievable methods of working in which every rule and timetable was blandly disregarded. He studied chemistry in the English class, and literature under the nose of the professor of mathematics. And side by side with this, when the fancy took him he would hand in exercises which were brilliant; but this seldom happened, for in class the tall Soufflay was usually asleep behind a solid rampart of Latin and Greek dictionaries, this being a means of recuperation after nightly vigils. The boy would declare that he was in the habit of leaving the dormitory at night in order to go and smoke pipes in the deserted corridors. He had in fact, hidden away in his playbox, an assortment of pipes, genuinely coloured, which were a source of envy to the bolder spirits. Besides this, he was interested in the upbringing of snails, and kept in his desk several inmates which crawled and left their slimy traces over his schoolbooks. The tall Soufflay was in consequence continually prowling about in the vicinity of the kitchen-garden, into which, defying all obstacles, he would steal surreptitiously and bring back fresh nourishment as a treat for his slimy pets.

Lucien Maréchalais was hero of an exploit of undying fame. It dated from two years previously and assured him an immense reputation which would remain with him until he left the College. One day, while seated in class, he came out with an emphatic “You be blowed” to the Abbé Jubil, who was generally regarded as quite the biggest swine of all the masters in the establishment. Any other boy would have been expelled, but the Maréchalais were connected with the great de Lagoumette family which in less than fifty years had produced several notable

dignitaries of the Church, including two bishops and no less a person than Xavier-Melchior de Lagoumette, who ended his career as leader of the Jesuits. Now the Jesuits, as is well known, are subtle organizers. Xavier Melchior de Lagoumette happened to be own great-uncle to Lucien Maréchalais. The nephew owed his salvation to this most venerable kinship. It was proved that the Abbé Jubil, in reprimanding the boy, had made use of certain unfortunate expressions, and it was therefore decided that he would have to content himself with a public apology. This apology was as frigid and impertinent as you could wish. From that day onwards the reputation of Maréchalais, whose character and family connections were equally formidable, could only increase and flourish. He was much admired.

Admiration was also bestowed, though for very different reasons, on Dominique Issartier de Beyre. Handsome and graceful as a Donatello portrait, elegant, disdainful, indifferent to others, with an odd kind of aloofness which was in itself an ornament, he was the incarnation in his comrades' eyes of the romantic element in the College. He was known to have a young cousin, Léone de Vailly-Citot by name, a lovely girl of twenty-two, of exceptional breeding and refinement, whose photograph he had shown to some of the elder boys. It was generally supposed that between Issartier and this charming cousin of his there was a bond of love— a love ill-starred and vaguely incestuous (a term whose significance was hardly grasped by the boys, but which added still further to their wonder and admiration), in short, one of those consuming and terrible passions which are described in forbidden books. It was freely alleged that Dominique Issartier was in the habit of bribing the day-boys to post in the town, letters with mysterious initials, addressed to Paris to be called for at a certain post office. This pupil was accustomed to carry, in place of a handkerchief, two or three shreds of feminine underclothing of a highly intimate kind. These fragments, highly perfumed, he would sometimes hold to his lips and busy himself in dreams of a nature beyond the reach of boys still being assailed by the demons of puberty, and lacking, as he did not, a fair and worthy object of adoration. It should be added that this pupil's father, Ignace Issartier de

Beyre, a diplomat of the old school, lived abroad and was constantly travelling in foreign countries, whence he wrote to his son. The glamour of the father's career conferred upon the son a reputation for expert knowledge in the realms of exotic love. His comrades felt that there was little he did not know where the women of Spain or Italy, lovely Creoles or Viennese beauties were concerned—indeed all those members of the fair sex who are adjudged supreme in the art of love. Needless to say, Dominique Issartier was not prepared to confide in any of the young whippersnappers whose doltishness he found so deplorable. But the manner he adopted in refusing to do so only strengthened their conviction of his superiority.

It will be gathered from the foregoing that in spite of occasional instances of boasting and swagger, it was generally agreed that Zinopino and Issartier, unlike each other though they were, yet were undoubtedly the only two boys in the College who had already succeeded in interesting women; and every other boy, smarting under the consciousness of his own awkwardness and ignorance, blushed with shame at his own inability to compete in audacity and self-confidence with these two prodigies.

While the tall Soufflay had amply earned his reputation for fanciful eccentricity, Noel Cacia was just such another. This boy, displayed the odd and very unusual combination of being at the same time one of the most remarkable exponents of the art of ragging in the College and one of its most brilliant scholars. The masters stood in awe of his impertinences, his extravagant comments, his bitter wit which often caught them unawares; but they admired his facility and treated him with indulgence, since they counted on him to gain certain academic distinction for the College the facts being that Noel Cacia, despite his clownish antics and ungovernable outbursts of laughter, could extricate himself from the traps and pitfalls of the dead languages as well as any seasoned scholar, knew dates and clauses of treaties as though he were a historian grown grey in the writing of treatises, and could juggle (an exceptional faculty in his case, being generally withheld from those whose bent is towards classical culture) with logarithms and the most abstract and complicated puzzles in spatial geometry. As an interlude between a

couple of translations, he would regale himself on trigonometry or find the algebraical equivalent of the weight, waist measurement, and cephalic density of his professors, as naturally as other boys would take to picking their noses. And for that matter, a simultaneous pursuit of work and pleasure did not preclude Noel Cacia either from indulging in that habit. On the contrary, he was much taken up with his nostrils, from which he derived occasional inspiration together with trifling additions to his nourishment, for he was a victim of all kinds of morbid hunger; in the refectory he ate ravenously, in class he gobbled up knowledge.

The above portrait would be incomplete without some description of the physical characteristics of this astonishing youth, from whom everything good and everything bad was equally expected. Think of him then as short and thick-set with a rather flabby corpulence, a shapeless and even comic build, features devoid of all individuality or charm, always deplorably turned out, and unalterably opposed to all forms of bodily exercise and hygiene. To this may be added an incoherent, headlong way of expressing himself and an exasperating laugh like that of a half-wit, of which, in a spirit of mockery, he made excessive use. He was continually posing as an imbecile, with a kind of genius for it, and with a delight that was almost sadic. And this was the boy who for years past had outstripped his companions in all his studies—and without effort. His masters were baffled by him, but they had been obliged to face realities and place him in a special category, as a good pupil who could *not* be held up as an example to his fellows.

The elder boys in a college, like the veterans in a barracks, have a hard-bitten appearance which can be recognized at a glance. The older members of a college are like ex-convicts who are of no further interest to anybody. No one, in the town, paid any attention to a group of schoolboys who, nevertheless, thought themselves extremely daring. Anxious to observe every precaution, the *Malgaches* crept stealthily through a series of narrow, dark and sordid streets. Their success in playing truant, contriving to run loose, involved the problem of avoiding cap-

ture by one of the College fathers, for at Valmonciel there are priests trailing about everywhere, just as in garrison towns military police are constantly to be seen.

In the shadow of a doorway in a side street, the boys held a council of war. Freedom is a precious boon; and yawning at shop-windows is a poor use to make of it. They had just passed two confectioners' shops with barely a glance—a decisive proof that such insipid pleasures were not for them. They looked at each other, hesitated, and the great question was given utterance:

“Where do we go?”

“To have a lark, of course!”

What a prospect! Above all, when the “lark” was to be of a forbidden nature, a *guilty* one, the kind reserved for real grown-up men. Thoughts of what lay in store, with all its allurements, sprang up within their minds; though accompanied by terror for the frailer spirits, whom only sheer bravado could have brought there at all.

“Well, you chaps?”

No one would take the first step. In a state of trepidation they continued to wait until someone should have the courage to suggest a programme, dreading all the time lest it should be precisely the one which they so greatly feared. Suddenly Zinopino broke in and settled the matter.

“Well, are we going there? Going to see the ladies?”

The reader will hardly deny that this was a desperately venturesome undertaking for boys of sixteen, pupils, all of them, of the worthy Fathers! It should here be explained that by some means or other the reputation of “The Toboggan” had penetrated the precincts of the College. This was the name given to a kind of tavern, not easy of access, situated in the tortuous and winding Grove Street, where comely and very airily clad ladies, after serving the customers, would seat themselves at their table and, in the intervals of sipping—at their expense—liqueurs of superior quality, would enter into the friendliest relations with them. They would even tolerate, in return for some rather lavish expenditure, liberties of a tactual nature, and accept engagements for their nights or their days of freedom. Rumour has it that

"The Toboggan" was a Palace of Delights, and its occupants like those of Mahomet's paradise. Two day-boys declared that they had already had their first experience of love within its walls. They were probably lying; but their boasting, immediately it was overheard, was quite enough to stir up an element of dangerous rivalry—a rivalry, be it said, which was limited to the *Malgaches* faction, which, needless to say, was far in advance in such matters of the insignificant little urchins in the lower classes.

The intention of these aspirants to virile honours and emancipation was to astonish their fellow-pupils by an account of an actual visit to "The Toboggan." Several boys from the College had, in actual fact, prowled about alone in Grove Street at night-fall and examined, from the opposite pavement, this renowned if formidable establishment. Not one had entered it, for the most determined of them, no sooner had they got beyond that door which was the open sesame to delights beyond all imagining, than embarrassment at the thought of their own inadequacy overwhelmed them. With women, whom they were already beginning to discuss with the cynicism of seasoned libertines, even had they been given a free hand they would not have known how to proceed. And so, in the presence of these haunting but inaccessible creatures, of whom they wished to take violent possession (but where? but how?) they were gripped by fear and blushed absurdly in their utter inability to conceal the fact that they knew nothing of the very rudiments of love. Each boy was now taking stock of himself, of his qualifications, doubting his own adequacy, doubting his strength. Were they *really* men? Love appeared to them in the guise of an examination to be passed, more to be dreaded than a University final, and the fair examiners, for all their blandishments, filled them with greater awe than any crusty old professors could have done.

The embarrassment of these boys on that 3rd October 1912 as they discussed, with a courage that was mere pretence, whether they should make this visit to the ladies of "The Toboggan" will now be readily understood. Several of them were thinking of retreat, but they needed a pretext which would still preserve

their self-esteem. The most anxious of them all to escape was Trouche. Let us explain.

He had in actual fact made his way to Grove Street the year previously. He came one evening to the door of "The Toboggan," but on arrival there, not daring to enter, he nevertheless had the audacity, making use of the poles of the awning, to hoist himself above the curtains (which were always carefully drawn) and take a hurried glance at the interior. While thus suspended in mid-air, he felt someone seize his leg; and at the same moment a raffish voice asked him: "Coming to see us, ducky?" As he turned round the boy's eyes were met by a terrifying spectacle. A thick-set, dumpy little woman, with lips and cheeks of astonishing redness, her eyes coated with a sort of bluish paste, a mop of flaming red hair, and whose dress, which fell away largely in front, displayed what appeared, as seen from above, as a pailful of bare flesh into which the rash youth felt himself to be in imminent danger of falling headlong. The boy took a desperate leap aside and made off as fast as his legs would carry him, whilst the brazen creature's strident laughter pursued him as he ran. The echoes of this laughter, which appeared to him to be charged with second sight, as though it were the laughter of an evil spirit with knowledge of our most secret and shameful actions, resounded in his memory long afterwards. For several weeks he was visited by this atrocious woman in a series of horrible dreams. She appeared to him as a lewd sorceress, endowed with irresistible strength. This frightful personage would undress him, grinning as she did so, and seize and hold him by main force. The boy would then feel as though he were sinking beneath the waves of an angry, raging sea.

Wild horses could not have dragged Trouche back to "The Toboggan". He was convinced in his mind that every inmate of that establishment knew the story of his flight, and that the horrible woman was still awaiting an opportunity to overwhelm him with ridicule. Zinopino had just repeated his proposal when Trouche broke in with a firm declaration:

"As far as I'm concerned, I'd ever so much rather go and have a drink at a big café. The women *there* are topping!"

"So would I," said Pascalon.

"So would I," said Guitou.

Thereupon the funks of the party hastened to make themselves scarce. Zinopino cried out to them in sarcastic tones:

"Hi! there, you little innocents! If you want the nannies' registry office I'll give you the address!"

The stalwarts then took note of their numbers. There were five of them, Zinopino, the tall Soufflay, Maréchalais, Noel Cacia, and Dominique Issartier. This did not include Lhumilié, who had accompanied them from the outset of the expedition, and was obviously pining to stay with them until the end. But could they be burdened with him?

This boy of barely fifteen was a mere simpleton and always at the bottom of his class. He was a sort of figure of fun, a fool whom nevertheless one could not help liking, and who acted as scapegoat for his fellow pupils on occasions when they wished to play some outrageous trick in class, when they prompted him in whispers from behind. The boy was given to giggling on every possible occasion, and his incredible silliness was manifested in sudden explosions of shrill, ungovernable laughter, with dribbling mouth and watery eyes; the result of which was a physical need so urgent that, as he fled from the room, he would sometimes leave a trail of drops behind him, like a very young puppy. This grotesque, ill-proportioned lad (every feature in him was in some way askew, his ears, his eyes, his cranial protuberances) was nevertheless the very best of good sorts. Often punished for his companions, he never betrayed a soul; and lived happily in a mist of vague and intangible delights, with the result that no one could ever make him really depressed. Even when standing in a corner with his nose to the wall, Lhumilié would roar with laughter. Everything with which he came into contact, whether it were the work of God or man, was transmuted into an object of mirth; the reading of notes, the lamentations of Jeremiah, the psalms, a green-fly, a small flower, the shape of a cloud, a dog's droppings, the fried potatoes which were served once a week in the refectory. A rude noise would send him into ecstasies of delight. This ineradicable good temper ended by discouraging all efforts at persecution. Endowed with the rare and enviable gift of being himself the source of his own

unalloyed happiness, Lhumilié was free both from jealousy and pride. He was full of admiration for the elder boys and gave them unswerving loyalty.

However, the little group, now on the point of making a beeline for "The Toboggan," was still hesitating to burden itself with Lhumilié. Zinopino, the leader, asked him, roughly:

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Mayn't I come with you? Mayn't I? I say, you fellows, do be sports! You will, won't you?" Lhumilié kept on repeating.

"He's a good kid," the tall Soufflay said. "We might take him."

"He won't go and split on us?"

"Look here, I swear I won't! See!" Lhumilié exclaimed, as he made the sign of the Cross with his two forefingers, at the same time spitting on the ground, on which he had already thrown his cap, as earnest of his great sincerity.

"He's not a sneak, he certainly isn't," Maréchalais urged.

"Come along, then," said Zinopino. "But if you don't keep your mouth shut . . ."

"But I swear I won't say a word!" Lhumilié repeated. "On my honour, Zino, on my honour, by all I hold most sacred! So there!"

"Well, gentlemen, since we are all of one mind, let us go and demean ourselves with the gay ladies of Grove Street," Dominique Issartier said, with his accustomed air of lordly disdain.

He drew from his pocket one of his famous pieces of silk and regaled himself with delicate perfumes, redolent of sweet promise.

Within a few minutes they were facing the door of "The Toboggan," which Zinopino pushed open boldly. The rest followed, with beating hearts. In the large and almost deserted room the majority of the waitresses, seated in a group near the cashier's retreat, were occupied in various tasks of needlework. A solitary pair of them were playing cards and smoking Turkish cigarettes. Overjoyed at this sudden windfall, they sprang forward to welcome the boys.

"Why, it's the little curés!" the fat Emma cried out. "Well, darlings, come to have a bit of fun with us? It's a sight gayer

here, with all those beads you have to keep on telling. . . . Come and sit yourselves down, my pets. Oh! but look at 'em, I ask you! They're just a lot of babies!"

"That's all *you* know about it, fatty," Zinopino exclaimed, grinning. "You aren't the first, by a long chalk. . . ."

The patroness of the establishment, anxious to avoid trouble with the police, was already arriving hurriedly on the scene, and urging the members of her staff to go gently with the pupils of the Fathers. But she might have spared herself the trouble. These women, if you knew them, were in reality kind-hearted creatures, condemned by sheer necessity to a life of drab debauchery. Every maternal instinct that still lay dormant in their dulled, besotted minds had just been awakened at the sight of these embarrassed schoolboys, whose boyish faces, on which the down of youth was as yet hardly visible, melted their hearts.

"I could eat them up, Madame Julietta!"

"Look at that one over there, the one who can't stop laughing. He'd be splendid for my little René, my sister's kid, who's just rising twelve."

The women seated themselves among the boys. But the latter, profoundly uneasy, could only sit as quiet and well-behaved as though they were at a Confirmation class, while they continued to drink their mixture of beer and lemonade. With the exception of Zinopino, who treated them with an easy familiarity, and Dominique Issartier, who called them "my dear," each one of them addressed his neighbour as "Madame" and behaved as though he were paying a call. Furthermore, the subjects of conversation between boys who were wearing scapularies on their breasts or carrying rosaries in their pockets, and ladies of easy virtue whose underclothing was of the scantiest, were sadly lacking. The atmosphere of embarrassment became infectious. Accustomed to procedure less restrained, these ladies felt, with clients of such unusual reserve, that they were falling short in their profession—that, in fact, they were stealing these children's money. Finally, the fat Emma cried out:

"Now then, you boys, you haven't come here to sing vespers to us, have you now!"

"Oh! let them be," the tall Yvonne said. "You can see they're feeling a bit strange, at their age."

"And they're well-brought-up boys, too," the dark-haired Loulou observed. "They aren't just anybody's sons, going to swell colleges like that!"

"And, my word, it costs a lot, you'd never imagine! René, my sister's kid, went to the elementary near his home, seeing his father couldn't afford anything better. He's just a turner in a factory, Louis, my sister's husband, that's all he is."

At this point the whole company began a discussion of the College, and everyone felt more at ease. The fat Emma asked: "It's going with women that the curés are specially down on, so I've heard?"

"Well, you don't suppose that men who've sworn to God that they'll never touch a woman are going to send their pupils along to us, now do you?" the tall Yvonne said.

"Never touch a woman, that's a good one, that is!" Loulou exclaimed. "I've known some pretty brisk curés, that I have!"

"Well, they *are* men, after all, aren't they?"

"And some of 'em handsome, too."

"And some you can't tell what they're driving at. . . . You remember Josiane, a girl who'd been in a house at Toulouse. She used to know a curé . . ."

But the fat Emma had another question to ask the boys.

"Your curés at the College—there are some who touch you sometimes, so I've been told . . ."

She was violently interrupted by the tall Yvonne.

"You're a disgusting, filthy woman, Emma, daring to talk like that! You can go with men just because it's your job—like we all do—without interferin' with religion. Tarts we are, I grant you, but all the same there *are* things that are sacred, and you can't touch 'em. It'll bring you bad luck, this will."

"Just you hold your tongue, Emma," the proprietress called out, in a tone of severity, as she kept a watchful eye on the tables from her raised enclosure.

"What's that!" the fat Emma retorted. "So now we mayn't say a word!"

"If you want to talk filth, Emma, you can keep it for those

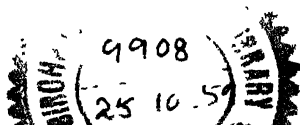
re-enlisted N.C.O.s who'll be along here presently. Till then, mind your step."

The conversation was resumed, taking a languid and thoroughly respectable course. Time passed. With the exception of Zinopino, who was engaged in hearty and unrestrained exchanges with the girl seated next to him, and Dominique Issartier, who was allowing himself to be admired by the ladies in general, all the boys, too nervous to take the least initiative, were longing to find themselves once more in the street, now that the glory of a "visit to the ladies" had been well and truly won.

At the station, where we have previously left them, parents and pupils alike were now drifting slowly towards the exit, whilst taking opportunities of resuming social relationships which, with a few rare exceptions, had been suspended for three months.

The boys contrived to exchange little signs of friendship without attracting the attention of their elders; but for the purpose of introductions, they chose only the most industrious and well-behaved, preferring to wait until later to get into touch with their own special pals.

Mutual civilities between the various families were not resorted to without previous consideration of their respective rank, wealth, or even dress; and until this had been accorded, no greetings could be deemed in every respect appropriate. Even in a college where social exclusiveness was the rule, it was regarded as important that the select few should be clearly defined and easily recognized. It may be assumed that these parents included only gentlefolk among their numbers. There might also be seen, in a comparative minority, a number of people of considerable social standing, those ordinarily spoken of as having "a fine position," "considerable wealth," or as being "of excellent family." Expressions of mutual sympathy, exchanges of polite remarks—all of these were now being based on a careful grading of fine distinctions. The answer to that question so frequently asked among the boys—"What does your father do?"—provided these families with just the information they needed to enable them to resume acquaintanceships with deliberate inten-



tion of doing so. The fathers took off their hats to each other with elaborate gesture; and the warmth of these greetings showed the extent to which they felt convinced of belonging to the same social sphere.

More indulgent than the men, rather unnerved by thoughts of imminent and painful separation from their boys, and united by the absorbing cares of motherhood which were shared by all alike, the women devoted their whole attention to the boys' appearance, and any indication of their state of health which they could observe. Such were their predominant feelings as they continued, nevertheless, to exchange compliments on successes gained by their sons during the past school year, or to express the hopes they entertained for the year just beginning. All of them, in fact, showed pride in their offspring and had the highest expectations of them.

No claims to human merit could ever be established were it not for comparison. Abolish the rogue, and the honest man is shorn of his halo; let there be no more cowards, and the hero's value is lost; do away with hell, and heaven would be but an infinite expanse, a trite, insipid void. The law of inequality is in very truth a cunning device for the awakening of human self-respect and the encouragement of rivalries that bear good fruit. It is this law which enacts that in every sphere of human life there shall be found, to serve as contrast, a few examples of base iniquity. Chance, the supreme Distributor, never fails to allot the vile a place not far from the sublime; and it is from this cleavage, this contrast which none can fail to see, that we derive that pleasant self-complacency which saves our lives from being a sorry business altogether.

And thus it came about that in the midst of a gathering of good parents and of sons who did them credit, the Nusillon family, a pitiful and shocking trio, stood out as an example of the lowest depths of mean vulgarity to which a middle-class family, when chronic dissensions preclude all harmony between its members, can descend. It was not without feelings of disgust (a disgust which nevertheless brought its own satisfaction since it emphasized the value of their own calm, quiet dignity) that the parents of the boys overheard, as they passed by, the echoes of a violent

dispute, a dispute in which a single voice rose high above the others. This was the voice of M. Alfred Nusillon, merchant, who was giving evidence of displeasure with his offspring, the pitiable Hector Nusillon, a pupil in the fourth form.

"A half-witted little idiot, and he'll never be anything else!"

"Oh! Alfred," Madame Nusillon entreated him, "not in front of everybody, please, please!"

"I don't care a damn for any of these people. I don't interfere with them, do I? Well then, they can leave me alone—or I'll tell 'em straight what I think of them. And no one's going to stop me saying—*shouting* if I want to—that that disgraceful little imbecile will be no better than a half-wit for the rest of his days!"

"Alfred, believe me, you are much, much too hard on this child. You will only make him start crying again. What will he look like when he gets back to the College and all his friends see him?"

"Well, let him cry, let him, the little fool! And mark you, it's you he takes after, the Mortifioux. I never knew such a blubbering lot as that blasted family of yours! Your mother's a champion crybaby!"

"That only shows that she has a kind heart, and it isn't everyone can say he has that. Thank God, the Mortifioux have no reasons to envy the Nusillons. Everybody knows where my poor father's money came from. He was a chemist at Laroche-Garigue. . . ."

"I know! I know! And he sold some foul mixture. . . ."

"Bilioline—a foul mixture! A medicine recommended by leading specialists in France and abroad."

"My good woman, you're just a fool!"

"And there were all the testimonials on every prospectus—you know there were!"

"A fool, a fool! . . . Anyhow, that's enough of it! All that twaddle, it's simply to stick up for your brat, to put him against me, the little half-wit, idler, hypocrite. . . ."

"He's your son!"

"There are times when I wonder."

"Alfred!"

"Stop it, I say! That's enough whining! And tell that little idiot to stop staring at me with that drivelling look he always puts on when he sees me, just because you back him up and weaken my authority. That frightened look I always see him with! Frightened of whom? His father, is it? A boy who has an easy conscience, a boy who does his work properly and gets good reports—he isn't frightened of his father. Look at those others, the good ones, and see if *they* are all of a dither with their parents. And you and I—we're saddled with this little dunce!"

"But, Alfred, you are most unreasonable. You keep scolding the poor boy just when he is going to leave us for three months after promising to work well."

"Work! He'd jolly well better work! I'm sick of being thought of as the father of a degenerate, a young scamp, and paying for the little idiot to get a tiptop education. I won't go on stinting myself any longer. Yes, by Jove, he'd better work! And what's more, I won't have him mixing himself up with all the rowdies at that place. I'm going along there one day to put things to rights, and there'll be the very devil of a row then, you can take my word for it! There'll be smacks in the face and kicks on the bottom that they'll hear all over the College. I never say things I don't mean. There's going to be the hell of a bust-up, my God, there is! So—I advise him . . ."

"But, Alfred, he tells you he is going to work hard. . . ."

"All right, all right, we shall see. I'm not interested in promises, reports are all I care about. Forewarned is forearmed! And now let him blow his nose and wipe his eyes and try to look a bit cheerful and more wideawake, the little fool! Let him buck up and look jolly, or I'll give him a box on the ears that'll give him something to think about!"

As they were leaving the station they came upon a drinking-fountain, at the edge of the pavement, from which a thin stream of water flowed. Hector Nusillon bathed his face, dabbed his eyes, and moistened his unruly hair which was insufficiently covered by his school cap. He was sniffing loudly, and his whole frame was shaken by sobs which he was trying hard to restrain. His distress made him repulsive to look at. And his dress ridiculous.

This pitiable schoolboy was one of those children whose rapid growth takes place with an entire disregard of the powers of resistance displayed by good cloth. Now while the College tailor's measurements were, of set purpose, no more than approximately correct (his excuse being that a certain imprecision in this matter was merely a wise precaution), he nevertheless supplied the pupils with material of very hard texture, knowing quite well that he had nothing to lose thereby, since clothes impervious to hard wear would in any case become useless by reason of their wearer's growth. But the father of a dunce—who, though he shot up like an asparagus plant, would never emerge from his distressing ignorance—had no intention whatever of wasting good money on the sterile pleasure of the adornment of a lazy sluggard. He continued, therefore, to allow his son to go about in superannuated rags, until such time as all possibilities of repair had been finally exhausted. This form of paternal reprisals gave Hector Nusillon the appearance of a small page-boy in a tenth-rate hotel. His socks, falling in disarray around his ankles, could be seen beneath trousers too short for him; and his bony wrists, projecting some four inches from his sleeves, drew attention to his red hands, their skin lined with cracks in winter and remarkably dirty at all times. Singled out for shame, and a target for violent outbursts of anger which rained upon him at all times and in all places, this—alas!—repulsive schoolboy, having abandoned the struggle against misery and disgrace, lived in humiliation and dirt without a thought of resistance, and stoically awaited the tempests of blows by means of which a model parent was accustomed, with no uncertain hand, to conduct his son's moral training.

Madame Nusillon, a querulous woman, torn this way and that by conflicting duties as mother and wife, had now also halted at the fountain and was addressing her pitiful offspring:

"You see, my poor Hector. If only you could work a little more. Tell me, why don't you work?"

This plaintive admonition, with its undercurrent of kindness, gave renewed vigour to Hector Nusillon's now almost vanquished sobs. Down his distorted little face there rolled afresh

the tears of a childhood overwhelmed by despair, at odds with circumstances too strong to cope with.

Seeing him so wretched, Madame Nusillon forgot her cue. Casting a timid glance at the broad and angry back of M. Nusillon, who was walking alone some twenty yards ahead and pondering over his grievances, she tried to comfort her son.

"Poor boy, I quite understand that it isn't always your fault. And I do really try to make your father see it."

"Oh, him!" the boy exclaimed.

"Yes, him!" Madame Nusillon echoed his words with a sigh. "Well, now you will be left in peace and quiet at the College for three months."

"Why doesn't he love me?" Nusillon asked, pointing at the terrible back, with the neck above it bloated and swollen with anger, ahead of him.

"He likes you in his own way. That's the sort of man he is. He's so peculiar."

"And you, Mummie, does he love you?"

"In his own way, Hector, in his own way—the same as you. And, darling, I may as well tell you that I too have had some pretty bad moments sometimes. Well, anyway, some day you'll be grown up, and then you will be able to go away. . . . Hector, child, give me a kiss."

Thereupon with eyes half-filled with tears, they rejoined that awe-inspiring personage, that redoubtable head of the family to whom they were fast bound by the dreadful ties of blood and of the law. As he drew nearer to his father, there appeared once more on Hector Nusillon's face that doltish, stupefied look which so greatly lowered him in the estimation of those who knew him. His fellow pupils were whispering to their parents: "That's Hector Nusillon, the boy who's so badly dressed. His father's always beating him." But the parents only replied: "But most likely he deserves it. Perhaps he's a very troublesome boy." For they disliked the idea of condemning this father in the presence of their own children. Having forgotten their own childhood, with all its torments, they had no thought in mind but to play their parts as parents in all seriousness, convinced that if any doubt were cast on the justice, the good judgment, the conduct,

or the infallibility of parents in general, the bringing up of children would become an impossibility.

And now, on the crest of the hill which the whole company was steadily ascending, the imposing group of the College buildings came clearly into view. And an unworthy little member of that same College was indeed far, far less deserving of attention than its own solid mass. For the time had come for these parents to prepare themselves for a dignified and solemn entry into the main courtyard.

As for the new boys, their feelings of terror and dismay were now redoubled. For they were rapidly approaching an adventure which would be long-drawn-out, pitiless, inevitable; and every phase and detail of it directed by stern strangers who would care nothing for them.

Situated in an industrial region which extends over several departments of south-eastern France, the little town of Valmonciel, with its population of eighteen thousand inhabitants, included in 1912, amongst other establishments from which it derived a certain importance, a large college which was a centre of education for boys of good family, who were recruited from an area extending to fifty miles in all directions, and some of whom even came from more important towns. Built at the farther end of an open valley, the town lies on the slopes of hills at the extremity of the line which bars its view of the country beyond. At the point where the town comes to an end in a series of private properties stood the College itself, enjoying all the advantages of a situation on high ground and close to the open country. It is well known that the monks of all religious Orders have always excelled in establishing themselves in the most beautiful and favoured spots. This tradition was responsible for the choice of the site on which the College was erected—on plans not a little pretentious for that period. Its construction dated back to about thirty years before our history opens.

The College of Sainte-Colline was at that time an institution of very considerable importance. Within its walls some thirty priests, members of the Order of the Holy Trinity, conducted the education of rather more than two hundred pupils, boys of

sound local origin, most of whom were boarders. This education was of the superior and refined type, and very expensive. It was based on classical culture and the soundest Christian principles, and designed for the moulding of boys who later on would be qualified to enter the learned professions, or to take their rightful places amongst the governing classes of the country.

On that 3rd day of October 1912, when the College was reassembling in full force, there were two priests who, by reason of the functions they exercised, became of outstanding importance. They were the Abbé Fuche, the Father Superior, and the Abbé Ragraton, the Bursar. It was they whom the parents were now specially anxious to see.

The position occupied by the Abbé Fuche called for a display of spiritual enlightenment side by side with worldly wisdom. The more evidence he gave of an exalted plane of thought, inclined to the making of generalizations, the better, in the eyes of the pupils' parents, was his service to the cause of a fine institution intended only for those boys whose good birth enabled them to belong to it. Armed with exact knowledge of the circumstances of each family (for these ecclesiastical gentlemen prefer to take every precaution), he was well equipped for the making of tactful compliments and saying the right thing to everybody. His alone was the responsibility for the organization and management of the College; and he left all menial tasks to his subordinates.

And thus it came about that the burden of preoccupation with material things, with its constant accompaniment of the waste, deterioration, and decay inherent in those perishable articles with which man feeds and clothes himself, its mean and petty cares, its worries over complications of finance—that burden fell with full weight on the Abbé Ragraton, the accountant and book-keeper of the College, buried to the neck in temporal matters of the meanest and most sordid nature.

It was to him, therefore, that the parents, immediately after leaving the Father Superior, hastened with all speed for prolonged interviews on the subject of cod-liver oil, drawing or music lessons, private tuition, resoling of shoes, patching of

breeches, or darning of socks; and for complaints about the high total of their bills. The Abbé Ragraton, with a joviality and hearty good temper which nevertheless declined to make the slightest concession, stood his ground against one and all and never yielded a centime. Caught in the toils of this or that tradesman's accounts, this priest would extricate himself by a mixture of cunning and resolution which would have spelt fortune to many a layman. His subtle and compelling methods of hinting to parents that high principles and good manners are assets of incalculable value, were quite unequalled ("Such boys are received with open arms in the best society," etc., etc.). He would suggest in roundabout terms that families who were unfortunate enough to lack the means of paying for such high-class education could easily find other institutions at which their children would receive a tolerable training. Refinement and distinction are not, after all, indispensable items in the equipment of a good citizen; and there are many occupations in life for which an ordinary education may suffice. The whole matter, in fact, resolved itself into the ambitions of parents for their children, and their conception of their duties towards them. "But do not forget" the Abbé Ragraton would add, in pious and honeyed tones, "that we must beware of seeing only this earth here below. We must look higher than that." And he would then point upwards to heaven, implying thereby that the prospects of going there one day, as enjoyed by the pupils of Sainte-Colline, were particularly favourable. After arguments so convincing as these, any reductions in charges, however slight, were obviously ruled out.

Responsibilities so numerous and heavy as these would have ended by overwhelming the Abbé Ragraton, if this corpulent man had not had recourse to a sacrament which was hardly in the rubric, but which provided a useful addition to his strength. This was white wine. It should, however, at once be stated that the abbé had ample excuse for a moderate indulgence of this kind: and as it is the duty of each one of us to retain a clear conception of the direction in which our actions are leading us—especially when, as in the present case, overwork is taking most of the pleasure from life—it may be stated without fear of con-

tradition that this priest's occasional tipping was carried out in a true spirit of piety.

This habit of taking rather too much white wine had been acquired by the abbé through sheer devotion to duty. The fact was that he had an extremely stiff job. Persistently and methodically he bargained and haggled for the benefit of a large community which profited by his successful transactions but gave him comparatively little credit for them. At an early hour of the morning he might be seen on the brick flooring of the market-place, smelling fish and cheese, examining fruit and vegetables, and bargaining over every item with the utmost tenacity. The suggestion of sacredness which this trading carried with it was for the most part entirely lost on the salesmen, all of whom were thieves and afflicted with an incurable instinct for swindling. But as the abbé had very large sums of money at his disposal for purchases, being responsible for the provisioning of three hundred people, attentions of a certain kind were lavished on him—attentions which necessarily took the form of invitations, of which there might be twenty in a day, to take a glass of wine. The Bursar did not consider himself justified in sacrificing the interests of the College to considerations of pride and decorum. He knew how wrong it was to disdain to associate with the humble and lowly, and further, that tradesmen in general become more tractable with a man who can stand up to them without flinching. Jesus lived with sinners. He, Ragraton, might surely fraternize with market-gardeners.

Finally, there was the question of upholding the honour of his profession. The abbé could never bring himself to admit that a man who had said mass almost as soon as he had rolled out of bed should go off a few minutes later and let himself be cheated by godless heathens, and thieves and drunkards into the bargain. He had no hesitation in bawling at the top of his voice whenever it became necessary to put these rascals in their place. "Why, you'd fleece the Almighty Himself!" he would cry aloud, with the righteous fury of Jesus striving with the money-changers in the temple. "Look here, you people, what do you take me for—a family cook? If I'm wanting cod I'll easily get it elsewhere, and better quality, too—you pack of thieves!" Then he would

point to his cassock and exclaim, "If ever you see *this* worn by a fool, you can come and let me know!"

It will now be seen that there were good reasons for the statement that the little excesses of the Abbé Ragraton were amply justified by the aims and ideals which he kept so steadily in view. This priest had a constant feeling that, in keeping watch over the interests of the College by contesting every penny of its expenditure, he was running a branch establishment of heaven itself.

It cannot, however, be denied that his occupation had given him the spirit of a huckster and the instincts of a usurer. The margins in his breviary were covered with accounts, and arithmetical calculations might occasionally be seen sprawling over the text of the prayers. Any little instance of profit afforded the Bursar, jealous to the point of avarice for his community's welfare, a delight that knew no bounds, though he himself gained nothing thereby. Such was his state of mind that he could conceive nothing but that heaven would be found to contain immense stores for the sale of provisions. He pictured himself as settling down to gigantic stocktakings, and to a reorganization of the celestial co-operative societies; for the ethereal people up there would be sure to leave a great many things in a muddle, yet these beings, however insubstantial one may suppose them to be, would be bound to have certain needs. The abbé considered all these matters from the standpoint of a hard-bitten caterer. He had no quarrel with dogma, and dogma in any case was no concern of his. ("My dogma," he would say, "is this—that the storekeeper's pound shall weigh exactly sixteen ounces.") That the realms of eternal bliss should be able to dispense with a bursar's office appeared to him as nothing less than a monstrous absurdity. Organizers are needed everywhere; and if the Almighty Himself wishes celestial bliss to function smoothly, He is bound in course of time to entrust the matter to people in whom confidence may safely be placed. The abbé therefore remained in anticipation of a good appointment in heaven, worthy of his abilities, as managing director of all the general stores; nor did he despair of finding up there one of those excellent dry Mâconnais which are so delightful an accompaniment to the morning's work of a good Christian. Prospects such

as these helped him to endure the scorn and disrespect which were his painful portion on this earth here below. His occupation was looked upon as a queer sort of job altogether, and hardly one for a good Catholic. His fellow priests took but little pains to spare him their own views in this matter. "And to think," the scrupulous bursar would mutter, grumbling to himself, "that I dole them out a sacramental wine which would be a treat even for a fat pig of a bishop!"

Let us add, in conclusion, that the Abbé Ragraton was constantly intervening in the affairs of the College, in the guise of an obscure Providence which was often cursed for its stinginess, but was nevertheless indispensable. It was on him that they relied for their daily comfort, their security, and even their health. For the bursar was in supreme control of diet. It was he who was responsible for the recurring periods during which were served, in suitable proportions, the satisfying beans, the fortifying lentils, the platefuls of rice and macaroni, the cod for fast days, the fresh vegetables, figs, sweet cakes, the nourishing broth, the marmalade, the rhubarb jam, the laxative prunes. These foods, prepared by the nuns who worked in the kitchen without any of those culinary adornments which would have been a dangerous temptation to greed, afforded both a lesson in simplicity of living and an abundant means for the satisfaction of hunger. Thanks to this régime devoid of luxury but, taken all in all, laxative in tendency, there were no unhappy outbreaks at the College of enteritis, appendicitis, or any of those nasty tricks played by the stomach which are always due to some intestinal disorder. The bowels of Sainte-Colline, juvenile and adult alike, functioned harmoniously, with the happy rhythm ordained by Nature herself. Doubtless there were some pupils who abstained from a certain task which day by day was imposed on them. But this was due either to laziness, or to sheer horror of forgoing even a few minutes of the times allotted for play. Such cases were, however, known to the authorities; and castor oil, a product which the infirmary provided in no niggardly fashion, periodically rectified these examples of indiscipline.

Night had fallen—cold already at this time of year—bringing

in its train a ghastly atmosphere of brooding danger and hidden ambush, and striking terror into childish hearts too young to withstand it. Immense walls of impenetrable darkness, in which blurred and hazy forms quivered and shook with a faint suggestion of life, blocked and obscured every outlet of the building. Heavy masses of dark and dismal clouds had assembled, shrouding every glimmer of starlight. The College buildings, where a few dim lights, still further obscured by a mist which had crept up from the fields nearby, were burning fitfully, looked like some immense disabled ship, floating upon an ocean of illimitable gloom. With its freight of children whose parents had left them forlorn, and all its lights disappearing one by one, this floating derelict seemed as though by slow degrees it were being engulfed in an abyss of desperate and hopeless solitude. In the depths of this horrid sea, the youngest of the boys felt all the while that they were being submerged, dragged ever downwards by the weight of their own heavy hearts, into which, for the first time in their lives, suspicions of betrayal, and of the monstrous woes which life may hold in store, were steadily creeping.

Against the austere, forbidding walls of the College the autumn wind was waging dismal war, with long-drawn-out sounds as of human wailing. These would then cease, only to be followed, in the interval that ensued, by the oppressive silence of a world enshrouded in unfathomable darkness—the silence of a planet from which all light and warmth have fled. Then, suddenly, there would be heard afresh the dreadful moaning of illimitable space. The howling furies borne upon the wind, hurling themselves against the windows of the dormitories and shaking them in violent anger, were heralds, so it seemed, of a dire procession of awful days which henceforth would constitute existence for all those boys within.

For many of these, that night with all its terrors, its sinister forebodings, betokened the opening of a school career, the beginning of a stern and all too early apprenticeship from which, a few years later, these tender, sensitive minds would emerge fully armed and ready even now for life's ruthless battles. For many of those boys, this was the first evening since their birth

on which they had ever been totally deprived of watchful care. It was their first serious and painful parting; and now they were being handed over to a hostile, jeering crowd, which they suspected of being also cruel. For the first time in their lives they saw none but sullen, frowning walls around them; they felt that they had been abandoned to the mercies of relentless strangers; and fears of lurking danger weighed heavy on them.

For a number of these boys the precious joys of childhood were brought that night to an abrupt and brutal end. The Junior Dormitory—the dormitory of sorrows!—was occupied by the small boarders in their first term, aged from nine to ten years, little exiles all of them, quaking and trembling in their beds. There were Marcelin Jolibois, Julien Labraque, Marcel Monfalon, Etienne Pile, Jean-Louis Lescurol, Fernand Suintais, Joseph Mettois, Daniel Oufaille, and others, about thirty in all. Curled up like animals, in little timid bundles, still with the rounded bellies and thin, meagre limbs of early boyhood, these children, filled with yearning for the past and misgivings for the future, were looking to their own loneliness to provide them with protection against the contacts and espionage of a communal life in which it seemed to them that cynicism, prohibitions, and force must be the ruling factors.

In a dark and hidden recess, Father Biboux, a massive figure with a tender heart, and a rough exterior which effectively counteracted those demonstrations of kindness in which the educator of youth is forbidden to indulge, was praying earnestly before retiring to rest, at the same time listening absent-mindedly to the sounds in the dormitory, that touching medley of sounds that may be heard when the flame of childish lives burns low in sleep, with here a sigh and there a poignant call for help, or a cry from some small being in the grip of nightmare.

It was never without feelings of the strongest emotion that the priest in charge of the smallest boys returned each year to his post in the dormitory. The mystery of these young lives at the threshold of their destinies, of these instincts as yet untried and exposed to dangers none could foresee, the pervading odour of these young bodies, persistent and inescapable—all this disturbed him profoundly. In his nightly vigil over a tiny section of

humanity still so little responsible for the good and evil in the world, this man, overwhelmed by anxiety, was striving to fathom the why and the wherefore of all these earthly pilgrimages, these adventures in life's journey which were beginning with all the freshness and innocence of childhood, its pranks and mischief, its weakness, its hope, and which, after their due share of suffering and of fear, would end—every one of them—in the degradation of decay. Was it this that was necessary, inevitably necessary, in order that the world might be born again and receive its promised inheritance of glory? That harsh treatment, that fixed intolerance of the charm, the sprightliness, the enthusiasm of boyhood—those tortures of which he himself was an instrument—were they really required? To cover those young faces, so open and spontaneous, so alight and shining with confidence and friendship, with a mask of sadness, hypocrisy, and constraint—was *that* the need? Was there any incompetence—and how could it be explained?—which could ever justify those punishments whose terrors a boy innocent of all offence is called upon to endure? In the presence of those sleeping boys, whom he cherished as a father, the Abbé Biboux turned his thoughts to death.

Death was the theme of his meditations. And that obscure priest's life of his, offered to his Maker at first in the hope of a glorious hereafter and later consecrated wholly to working for the redemption of his fellow men—he would fain have had it that that life, thus consecrated, should redeem him by God's mercy from a future he wished at all costs to avoid. The sight of all those children filled him with remorse that he, of all men, should be living a sheltered life with every task clearly defined. He wished that he might suffer more, so that others—and above all these children—might suffer less, even as the good company commander, during a long march, himself shoulders a weary infantryman's knapsack. The journey of life is one which all must traverse, and the strong should give the weak a helping hand along the road.

For the Abbé Biboux, every little tremor of sound in the dormitory had its meaning. Almost infallibly, he could tell from which corner and even from which bed the slightest creak had

come. For the faintest of nocturnal sounds and signs he had an instinct as sure and certain as any old poacher's or of those who prowl along the river banks at night.

While thus occupied in meditation and prayer, he noticed, at some distance away, a sound of gentle weeping. The abbé crept quietly in the direction from which it came, and halted until he was quite sure that one of the pupils was in fact crying. It was a new boy, one of the very youngest, who was to be put into the seventh form. The boy could not get to sleep because he missed his mother's good-night kiss, that token of love and protection. The abbé bent over him, touched him gently, and saw his glistening eyes.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Patafiat."

"What else?"

"Robert."

"Go to sleep," the abbé whispered. "You will be quite happy here."

He laid his hand tenderly on the child's head. Then, overcome with pity, he slipped it between the head and the pillow and left it there against the hot, feverish neck, fragile as a bird's, where the blood was racing. But the weakness he had shown in face of this little lad's grief, and the flood of tenderness which had filled him when he touched this small, restless form, gave him a feeling, not easy to define, of guilt. As though to excuse himself to Him from whom nothing is hidden, he murmured: "Heavenly Father, this is little Patafiat, poor little Patafiat, who is so, so unhappy. Poor little Patafiat, who has lost his mother, who shall comfort him if not I?"

Soothed and consoled, the child fell asleep. His head, hot from weeping, rolled over on the pillow. With gentle care the abbé removed his hand and withdrew.

He made his way to the little nook in a corner of the dormitory assigned to the priest-in-charge, where for nine months in the year he took his rest behind a curtain which screened him from the pupils. He undressed, and then knelt for a final prayer. Still his thoughts were centred on the children, those children who were the only family he had, his only interest in this world.

For them he now made intercession: "O God, spare them too many trials and sorrows—do not send them more than they can bear. I can well ask you that, for to-morrow I shall be hard on them, since needs I must. And it hurts me to be sharp with them, O Lord, as you know. Give me grace to understand well what I am doing when I have to be severe, for it is you who said: 'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones.' Injustice is a grave offence against young and tender minds, which are so easily hurt, and that is why there is no such thing as a *small* injustice when one has to do with these little people. Give me grace, O Lord, never to feel any preference that is undeserved. I have fondnesses that may sometimes lead me astray. It is not always the hardest workers and the best-behaved boys that I prefer, alas, but often it is the poor little Patafiats who stay at the bottom of their class, or mischievous boys, little rogues whose openness and candour and high spirits delight me. I often say to myself that perhaps the better-behaved boys, who find it less effort to be good, are not the most deserving. The system, I know well enough, prescribes firmness, and I try hard to be firm. But the system, which is the outcome of success, always favours the powerful and the strong. And your heart, O God, is not so relentless as that!"

CHAP. II: THE SYSTEM

To have every year to fill the minds of about two hundred boys—while at the same time giving all needful attention to their health—with knowledge and with the principles of Christianity; to imbue them, if not with the love of God, at least with a fear of Him, and a horror of all kinds of sensual indulgence, and uncontrolled thinking; to implant in them a mistrust of all lines of argument tending to call in question the most firmly established customs and traditions—those which long use has proved to be best adapted to the tastes and requirements of the com-

munity—all this, it may well be imagined, was not exactly an easy task.

In order to give these boys such tastes and inclinations as would later on conduce to their leading lives befitting good Christians, good fathers, and good subjects of the Church, it had quite evidently been necessary to impose some severe forms of discipline which would preclude any periods of indolence or “time off” by which very youthful minds might easily become corrupted.

Some excellent remarks on this subject were made, in his famous treatise *On Efficacious Christian Teaching*, by Father Choumizat, S J, formerly head of a College, who died in 1887, having devoted the last years of his life to the making of a summary, in two volumes of five hundred pages each, of experience gained in forty years of teaching. He writes: “We must regard as a source of danger, where young minds are concerned, all flights of fancy, precocious curiosity, and that kind of mental dissoluteness which is too easily excused when described, with undue leniency, as ‘imagination.’ It is not good for children to indulge in idle dreaming, even if it begins by being pious. The urge to meditation will only be of value when it appears between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, with a suddenness which will make its effects more decisive. It has often been remarked that the troubles arising at the period of puberty (if cleverly handled by the father confessor) may eventuate in mysticism, and that mysticism may in turn develop into a sense of fitness for certain careers. But that applies only to special cases, cases of predestination. These exceptions prove the rule.

“The masters must make it their business to implant in the children’s minds a germ of indelible terrors which no outside influence will ever in any circumstances be able to remove. This mental substratum of fears, by which the action of each individual will be guided without his even realizing it, will become second nature with him, and this natural nature, extending to the majority of the pupils in our colleges, can only contribute to the strengthening of the bonds between the members of the vast Christian family, to the lasting spiritual benefit of the men who will have been shaped and fashioned by our hands.

"The moulding of youth by reasoning and argument is of less importance than to endow it, unknown to itself, with genuine intellectual reactions which will act, so to speak, automatically. There is one essential point on which masters should be thoroughly convinced, and that is, that very few people are capable of reviewing the groundwork of their own education; and there would be fewer still if the original hold over them had been stronger. During the course of a long career we have been able many a time to verify the fact that men live on that store of knowledge and ideas which they absorbed towards the end of their period of adolescence. Later on, their attention is diverted by family and professional worries from everything that is not directly connected with that particular source from which they derive their means of existence.

"Virtue, like vice, can become a habit, for human beings always need considerable effort if they wish to free themselves from the habits and routine which set the pattern of their thinking at an early age. To bring a strong influence to bear on the thoughts of young people at the time when they are malleable—there lies the prescription for education that is to last. Masters must bear this in mind constantly while teaching."

No one could question the profound wisdom displayed in these opinions and precepts. Intentionally setting aside special cases, Father Chouminat concerned himself with average ones only. He advocates enclosing the young in a net of bounden duties which will leave them very few opportunities for the exercise of freewill. It will be seen that the administration of the College of Sainte-Colline appeared to have been inspired by the advice and recommendations contained in the treatise of this old pedagogue. Details should now be given.

TIME-TABLE

5 a.m.	Rise and dress. Morning prayers.
5.30-7.15	Study (lessons)
7.15-7.30	Breakfast
7.30-7.45	Recreation
7.45-8	Study (recapitulation of lessons)
8-10	In class

10-10.30	Recreation
10.30-12	Study (set tasks)
12-12.30	Midday meal
12.30-1.30	Recreation
1.30-2.30	Study (lessons)
2.30-4.30	In class
4.30-5	Recreation
5-7.15	Study (set tasks)
7.15-7.45	Evening meal
7.45	Evening prayers
8	Dormitory

Except for a short supplementary period of recreation in the summer months, before going up to the dormitory, this timetable was invariable, both in summer and winter.

There was Mass every morning at 5.30 at which attendance was optional, with compulsory Mass on Thursdays. On Sundays there were two Masses, Vespers, and Benediction. Periods of study, meals, and classes began and ended with a prayer. There were also retreats and other religious exercises on the principal feast days.

Confession and Communion were left, in principle, to each boy's discretion. But it was inadvisable to neglect them too long.

Footbaths once a month. Clean linen once a week. The pupils wore their uniform on Sundays and feast days.

There was a walk on Thursday afternoons, between 12.30 and 5. An exeat once a month. A week's holiday on the 1st January and ten days at Easter. In summer the boys went to the open-air swimming-bath on Thursdays when the weather was sufficiently warm. Gymnastics once a week in summer. (The time for gymnastics was deducted from that allowed for recreation, and the boys consequently detested this form of exercise.)

In the playgrounds, the pupils were ordered to play. Little knots of boys assembled for conversation and, derisively known as "the philosophers," were broken up and the boys punished. The games played were football, prisoners' base, walking on stilts, sliding, skating, spinning pegtops, ball games, and so on.

Each Saturday the week's marks were given out. The weekly reports were slipped into the letters which the pupils wrote to

their parents on Sunday mornings. These letters were opened in the Superior's room before despatch, and the letters arriving from outside were also opened before being handed to the recipients. All correspondence had to pass the censorship. Nothing was allowed to be brought into the College except quite indispensable articles. All literature that was not to be found in the College libraries was classified as "bad books," and ruthlessly tracked down. The possession by a pupil of a novel supposed to be of a demoralizing nature usually brought about his dismissal.

These boys had to live completely in the open. By their correspondence, by their degree of religious fervour, through the confessional, their thoughts and feelings were well known. Should the need arise, a still further source of information was available to the Fathers by "rummaging about"—a means to which they did not hesitate to have recourse; and this might be applied to desks or private boxes, if any pupils should come under suspicion. Another method of supervision, and not the least redoubtable one, since its anonymity made it an act of treachery, came from certain pupils who tried to curry favour by denouncing their comrades. These informers were contemptuously known as the "blabbers" or "sneaks," but it was often difficult to identify them. There were some priests who encouraged this practice.

Any breach of the rules, if it related to work or to discipline, was dealt with by the professors and masters on duty; and in serious cases by the Vice-Principal, who was feared for his severity. When these delinquencies involved questions of piety or moral principle, they were referred to the Superior, who alone was qualified to make decisions of vital importance.

Thus it was that the College constituted a little community in itself, entrenched within its own walls, and far removed from the storm and stress of the outside world. The system was paramount, supreme.

This system was essentially a rugged one; for the object of their masters was to turn these young Christians into nothing less than genuine soldiers of the Church, who later on would be well able to act as spokesmen of the infallibility and prestige of Rome.

Besides the system itself, there was the spirit in which it was administered. There could be no doubt that the Abbé Fuche was sufficiently imbued with the solid principles of Father Chouminat, S J, but that did not prevent him from knowing that no rules and regulations can survive without undergoing some modifications. Having to play the part of conciliator made it his duty to soften and tone down what might have proved to be somewhat rigid in any particular doctrine.

Hidden beneath a meek and mild exterior, the College of Sainte-Colline had its Torquemada, and beneath the surface the spirit of the Inquisition held sway. That spirit would have gained ground to a dangerous extent, had not the more liberally minded faction put a brake on its activities. For there were at the school two conceptions of piety: one grim, the other kindly, one narrow, and rejecting anything that savoured of compromise; the other milder and less rigid, and believing in the need of humanity to adapt itself to circumstances. The Superior was oscillating all the time between these two factions, adopting on each occasion the point of view which would be the more helpful at that moment to the great establishment of which he was in charge. As always happens in the affairs of the Church, which is bound to concern itself with temporal matters, the pill of dogma was hidden in the jam of politics and thereby made acceptable. The Superior held quite reasonably that his College was not a seminary. He was forming the characters of boys destined to go out into the world who had to be armed with a solid but not unyielding faith which should at the same time be a faith suitable for the ruling classes, capable of adapting itself to the requirements of a social life always full of complications. The object to be attained was this, that within the conscience of these boys the spiritual and the temporal should later be happily united, and that religion and ambition should dwell in harmony therein and never seek divorce.

The Papal democratic leanings of Leo XIII had died with him, and his successor Pius X had just announced, in a solemn encyclical, that any language which might inspire the people with aversion for the upper classes should be deemed wholly contrary to the true spirit of Christian charity. This was a handsome

recognition of the fact that there must necessarily be such things as rank, fortune, and prestige, to which both faith and piety must pay tribute; and that the Church, firmly established in her pomp and glory, has no intention of taking part in the revolutionary goings-on of the common people. Steeped in these principles of government, the Superior would say to himself that, all things considered, there was more value for the Church in a Christian with a slightly elastic moral standard, saved from twinges of conscience by conveniently broadminded views, than in the proud, uncompromising individual who, anxious on the score of loyalty to the Church, suddenly and without warning fails to keep up appearances, caring only lest his conduct should fall short of his principles. Religion should be a restraining influence. It should not be for ever asking questions to which proud natures can only give Yes or No as the answer. One does not expect a heroism the extent of which only the individual himself can know: all one asks is that a good example may be set, that shortcomings be discreetly veiled, and that there be a minimum of rites in the public eye.

The Superior also knew quite well what counted in the eyes of the world. All those rich middle-class families—the pick of the district—were not entrusting their children to the Order of the Holy Trinity to have them turned into future saints or anchorites of the desert. Achievements in the field of contemplation or of humble charity, meritorious though they certainly are, as earthly occupations are of a highly special nature, and win but small renown in a society which is apt to take offence at too much of this exemplary self-effacement. It is possible, thank heaven, to work out one's salvation in general society, and even to do it comfortably, without giving up those privileges of birth the inheritance of which has paved the way for the formation of groups of highly cultured people (or merely with refined and polished manners—which is always something!), sections of society which have as an adornment the Roman Curia, that great diplomatic body whose subtle missions are everywhere aiding the relations between the Kingdom of God and those of earth. It is an eminently satisfactory, indeed, a magnificent arrangement—and how profitable to the establishments of the Church!

—this alliance between the princes of the Church, those of the Sacred College and those in foreign capitals. It is of course true that the parables of Christ have sometimes been used for the glorification of the great unwashed. But this was only the naïve conception of simple untutored Galileans, at the time of the restoration promised to Israel, when the religion of redemption, still feeling its way, was coming out of the East in the guise of mendicancy. Since that time that religion has had a triumphal march, subduing everything that stood in its way, by means of a persevering and patient discipline which has lasted for centuries, and given rise to not a few massacres and many wars. Herself a mighty power in the world, and an imperishable one at that, the Church has set herself above the powerful and mighty. This admirable blending, under two allied authorities, of the interests of the spiritual and the temporal has made possible the setting-up of two parallel hierarchies, on which our present strength and safety are founded.

All these things the Abbé Fuche had to bear in mind, being supposed, by virtue of the functions he exercised, to contribute to the stability of an established order. Any impulse to meddle with this order, even in a very pious way, would have secured him in higher quarters that dangerous reputation of being "modernist"—a reputation which is the first step on the downward path to heresy (for the Superior had a very thorough knowledge of the text of the terrible encyclical *Pascendi*). To out-Herod Herod, or to be a more saintly Christian than the exalted heads of Christendom, can never be permissible. Moreover, the higher interests of the Church could not without danger be left to the free interpretation of some fanatical members of the lesser clergy. The Church has not forgotten the Reformation, nor the immense danger inherent in individual cases of mysticism, which come to birth beyond the borders of that great company which is under the supervision of those who administer the Faith. These strict and perhaps discouraging methods are the price which must be paid for unity, but unity, after all, is more important than very genuine merits which would threaten to sow disorder by creating rivalries from which dogma would not emerge unscathed. During their lifetime, saints are most embarrassing people. (Saint

Thomas and Saint Augustine were men who kicked over the traces.) The good they do is not seen until long after they are dead.

And lastly, the Superior knew that the head of a great college must found his reputation on the success of former pupils who have been moulded by his hands. It is necessary for an educational establishment to have produced some brilliant scholars who are making a stir in the world. The Abbé Fuche was compelled, for the sake of advertisement, to utilize everything that would make a strong impression on the parents' minds. Taking the long view of what would best further both their interests and those of the College, he was obliged to fall in with the whims and prejudices of the different families.

He was thus accustomed to quote, when mentioning the names of the most famous products of the College, those of men who had become well known for widely different reasons: Alfonso Lavarez (real name, Eugène Letripier), Baron Dufournel, Firmin Lepecqueur, Ange Rifaldin, Richard Marché, and Monseigneur de Viande.

To tell the truth, the case of the last mentioned may have given satisfaction to the Church, but it was hardly encouraging to parents. A child with a religious vocation is equivalent in their eyes to a kind of mourning, occasioned by a motive which seems to them to be on the whole very selfish. The being whom they have loved and cherished takes it on himself one fine day to desert them in order to draw nearer to God, and occupy himself exclusively with the important business of his own salvation, leaving his parents to get on as best they can amid the worries and troubles of old age without giving them the slightest assistance. And so it comes about that the sacrifices which they have made for his education are never repaid, while they say to themselves bitterly, "He might have waited for our own deaths before getting so busy over his. Is not devotion to parents the most exemplary, the most praiseworthy of duties? Really and truly, when children carry their piety to such extremes as this, they seem to lose all pity."

At the age of fifty-three, Alfonso Lavarez was still one of the handsomest men in Paris and one of the most sought after, and

most irresistible to a vast circle of women, which ranged from humble workgirls to ladies in the best society. The private life of this leading tenor at the Opera was notable for its long tale of passionate adventure, each episode being of a highly sensational nature. His conscience bore the burden of the suicide of an Austrian princess, and of the frightful scandal of his liaison in London with Lady F——, an English lady of great distinction, who had given up everything in order to follow him, and whom he abandoned three years later in Philadelphia during the course of a tour. Alfonso Lavarez lived in princely fashion and ruined women one after another. He was commonly supposed to be relentless and hard-hearted, was this dispenser of thrills. In actual fact, throughout a long series of adventures he thought of nothing else but his voice, and lived in terror of losing it. He made all those around him atone for a torment which left him no rest.

It might well be said that so far as intellect was concerned, Baron Dufournel simply did not exist. Nor did that personage shine in the matter of character. But he was acutely conscious of his noble rank, and that feeling was his substitute for personality, at a time when everything was bungled and shoddy. He himself did no bungling; he did a deal. This ruined nobleman had been cunning enough to go over and pick up the daughter of an American business man who dealt in the salted foods of Chicago, just before the prestige of Europe had ceased to impress the other continent. The Yankee, a bacon magnate, had had no hesitation in buying his daughter, a lovely but capricious young woman, a titled husband who cost him no less than one million dollars. No sooner had that million been steered into our banks (where it awaited fortune number two, for the pork-butcher would not live for ever) than Baron Dufournel found himself restored to a leading position among the French nobility. He gave gorgeous entertainments, patronized charitable undertakings, while the Baroness, a distinguished golfer, saw her photograph reproduced everywhere. The lustre thus shed upon him enabled the Baron to speak in the name of the old families of France and to pose as a champion of our best traditions. Besides all this, he collected pictures. At first this had

bored him. But he had stuck to it bravely, having detected the possibility, in the position he occupied, of doing some profitable business. He bought and sold works of art very cleverly, and boards, committees, and governing bodies were in constant competition for the authority of his name.

Firmin Lepecqueux had been through the seminary long before he plunged into politics, where he took with him certain ecclesiastical mannerisms which he had never got rid of, together with all the sectarian's fierce obstinacy, his object being nothing more nor less than to wipe out all traces of his early training. Furious at being treated as a deserter, he had just played a part in the business of separating Church and State, which had brought him into prominence. Having several times held office in the Cabinet, on the last occasion as Minister of the Interior, he was on the lookout for an opportunity to bridge the gulf which lies between the politician and the statesman. This former socialist was regarded as a future President of the Council.

In Paris, Jean Lorrain—or it may have been Ernest la Jeunesse—had dubbed Ange Rîfaldini "the painter of bosoms." This little fellow of Italian origin but French upbringing, a former winner of the *Prix de Rome*, was having a dazzling career as a fashionable painter, making portraits of every society woman of any note whatever. He immortalized on canvas, in return for much gold, the most beautiful displays of neck, shoulders, and bosom to be found the world over. It was as a technician of the highest skill that he dealt tenderly and lovingly with his models' breasts, his brushes giving them an outline and modelling of which he alone held the secret. This cleverness was not seldom rewarded by certain concessions on the part of his sitters, and the painter would often exclaim, when speaking of the fair ladies who came to his studio: "Upon my word, all these forbidding females take me for a bust-bodice!" Ugly, and distinctly ill-natured, Rîfaldini was in the habit of repeating pithy comments on these ladies here, there, and everywhere, and they were much feared. The audacity of some of his portraits had given rise to scandal, those, amongst others, of two or three well-known ladies of the *demi-monde*. These persons, whose figures were of

the finest, had every reason for wishing to display all they could, and Rifaldini, exploiting his great skill in the use of transparency, had pictured them almost naked. However, he charged these clients exorbitant fees, under the pretext that his pictures increased the market value of these fair creatures thus revealed for the delectation of the Paris public. And as a matter of fact they did.

Richard Marche was having a bold and adventurous career in finance. The risks and hazards of his early life had not disheartened him. Indeed, far from it. A sleeping partner in several undertakings with religious and moral tendencies well to the fore, he was finding Catholics a fruitful source of capital. He was even suspected of being financial adviser to several bishops with little aptitude for the management of money. Everyone with Leftist views thought of him as a knave; the Conservative element regarded him as a financial genius. This much is certain, that his dealings on the Stock Exchange, where he was a daring speculator, were on a vast scale, and that he lived in great style.

Such were the stamp and quality of the leading personalities for whom Sainte-Colline had been responsible, and who were conspicuous among a crowd of former pupils which included some missionaries, a Dominican, two Capuchins, three brigadier-generals, a vice-admiral, and a quantity of doctors, barristers, engineers, professors, officials, and manufacturers. (One sentence of penal servitude and a few others of imprisonment, several bankruptcies, and a considerable number of divorces, were naturally not mentioned.) With the exception of the monks, these men of importance did not make up a very edifying group, nor even a very moral one. There was nothing to show that they had derived any special benefit from their religious education. But the samples quoted above had to suffice, and be exploited to the best advantage.

These samples did in fact prove quite sufficient. Certificates of good moral behaviour were not demanded by parents and others in the case of persons whose names they frequently read in the newspapers. Their success in life was beyond dispute. That was enough.

This attitude of the parents gave the Abbé Fuche a hint of

which, as Superior, he would have been bound to take notice, in order that worldly considerations and the proper administration of his College should be nicely balanced. He knew when and where concessions should be made; and M. Pinoche, the millionaire, father of four boarders, made no bones about reminding the abbé, with the vulgar outspokenness of the self-made man: "Well, and who is it that's paying for all this? Here am I, having religion and education poured down my lads' throats, but all the same I don't want 'em to get stupefied with all that sort of stuff!" I must be careful, the Superior thought, to see that not only are clients not put off by our principles here, but also that any unreasonable demands on their part do not encroach too far on those principles. These were the horns of the dilemma with which the Abbé Fuche was constantly faced in running his College. This he did with discretion and tact, his convictions being strong enough to make him firm, while his scepticism was sufficient to allow him a good margin of tolerance. It was specially important that he should not be disobliging to certain influential families which, by reason of his good relations with them, constituted an excellent recruiting centre. Concessions are dangerous when they are made on wrong occasions. This mistake the abbé successfully avoided.

If the Abbé Fuche had a profound knowledge of the political history of the Church, there was another priest at the College whose acquaintance with the *Exercises* and *Constitutions* of Ignatius Loyola was no less thorough. It was on these works that he based his design for living, and ceaselessly spurred himself forward on the road to the attainment of a perfection which was to some extent hypnotic, and not far removed from the exploits of a Tibetan lama or an Indian fakir. But religious rapture can sustain a body that is terribly emaciated, and indeed, it is by systematic inanition from lack of nourishment, leading to what is almost a transparency of the physical frame, that great mystics reach supreme heights of exaltation and miraculous power.

The Abbé Marededicu was a would-be Jesuit, the state of his health having prevented him, in his younger days, from entering that famous Order. His regret at the frustration of this great

object drove him to apply to himself, with the utmost possible rigour, certain maxims in the "*Exercises*": "It is expedient to have a complete and unqualified hatred of everything chosen and beloved by the world. . . . Isolate yourselves, make a desert around you. . . . I should ponder on my corruption, my physical ugliness. I should think of my soul as a sort of ulcer and abscess whence have come forth swarms of perversities and a shameful poison."

This man who prophesied a life beyond the grave from whose glory there would burst forth a storm of vengeance, would sometimes cast upon certain self-indulgent priests glances filled with a supercilious irony which kept unbroken silence and was never expressed in words. The rare sentences which fell from those proud lips would have come as a shock to those comfortably esconced in a routine of vulgar pleasures—pleasures in which, as he would have said, only mediocre beings indulge, those unworthy of the sublimity of redemption.

It happens with certain people that their combined passions are transformed into a single one, a devouring, fulminating passion; and people of this kind sometimes become saints. But we have to distinguish between saints of tenderness and those of frenzy, who seem always to be ablaze in their own anathemas and writhing in the tortures of their own exorcisms. The Abbé Marededicu belonged to this latter category. The intense efforts he had made to further his own sanctification had left their mark upon him and given him a grim, forbidding appearance. It was doubtless in order that it might grant his prayers more fully that heaven, whose curses, a thousand times better than blessings for one who revels in suffering, he had called down upon himself, had given his smile a hideous twist, with a frightful expression which the word "diabolical" alone could adequately describe. By a strange contradiction, this priest, with intense spiritual ambition, whose striking countenance shone with a light which, if hard, was yet clear and strong, this outstanding exponent of religious fervour with accompaniment of suffering—no sooner did a slight relaxation of his mind and spirit deliver his thought from the dark but sublime regions in which he wandered with delight than he became a grinning, distorted, unnatural being.

Sometimes that face bore the luminous imprint of a visionary's rapture; at others, it was branded with the mark of the most atrocious crimes. Within that consciousness were enacted dreams of unimaginable depth and horror; it was the battlefield of an unending conflict between angels and demons, where each side in turn seemed about to snatch a victory in a struggle in which some immaterial, insubstantial fragment, made in the image and likeness of the Creator, was the prize at stake. In these excruciating agonies of the mind, perspiration oozed from him. From the sinuous, twitching lips of the Abbé Marededieu one looked for the fetid breath of relentless punishment no less than the glorious melodies of eternal bliss to issue forth. This priest bore heaven and hell within himself, the messages of the Apocalypse; and his ghastly grin, as of a lost soul, was terrifying. His tall, tragic shadow put to flight pupils who might meet him coming round the corner in a corridor. The other priests would have been ready enough to cross themselves as he approached them, so vivid was their impression that hidden beneath that saintliness was some portion of the fires of hell. But the abbé, who did all he could to augment this feeling of aversion, bore in solitude, as Jesus did, a weight of human ignominy, sustained and upheld by the pride of a lofty humility of which none of those around him was so capable as he.

The element of sarcasm, as of dark mystery, in all this virtue was a thing to be feared. The Abbé Marededieu, with his atmosphere of terror, was a source of discomfort to all the Fathers; he was avoided and he was hated. But he was also feared, for it was suspected—quite wrongly, however—that some unknown and secret authority had placed him there to act as spy and informer.

Somewhat against his will, but impelled thereto by the stir which these meritorious but theatrical manifestations created, and which he secretly condemned (outbreaks of an exemplary nature such as the abbé's were a dangerous distortion of the priesthood), the Superior had been unable to do less than give him exceptional spiritual authority. Besides the teaching of philosophy, he had been entrusted with the religious instruction of the higher forms. The Abbé Marededieu also heard the con-

fessions of boys in a state of mental stress, with all sorts of doubts and scruples, and searching their hearts as to the emptiness and vanity of a secular career. He urged them towards the priesthood with a frantic impetuosity which drew its inspiration from the following passage in the *Maxims* of his dear Loyola: "Though there be the greatest merit in serving God from sheer love of Him, we must nevertheless urge strongly the *need for fear of the Divine majesty, and not only that kind of fear which we call filial, but also the other kind, that which is known as servile.*"

So violent and terrifying were his upbraidings, they wrought such havoc in the minds of those who received them, and brought so many tears to the eyes of young penitents and gave them such nightmares, that it became necessary at different times to deprive Father Marededieu of the spiritual direction of certain delicate and impressionable boys. And even so, some accidents still occurred.

One story among others had made a great stir. It related to a pupil of the second class, Ludovic Rafalet, who, as the result of passing through the Abbé Marededieu's hands, had had to enter the sanatorium. Within the space of a few weeks this pupil had changed in a very alarming way, but declared that he was quite well and refused to go to the infirmary; and all this was regarded as being merely some trouble incidental to growth. But Rafalet became very seriously ill. The diagnosis disclosed double pneumonia. But it was the boy's thinness that so greatly surprised the doctor, and the latter, by dint of much questioning, succeeded in extracting the whole truth.

Intensely impressed by the Abbé Marededieu's counsel and advice, Rafalet was secretly applying himself to the practice of a form of asceticism of his own invention. The hapless boy had almost ceased to take any nourishment, or rather, as the pupils' feeding was under supervision, on leaving the refectory he went to the lavatory and made himself sick there. While in this state of great enfeeblement he had the further idea of leaving the dormitory at night and, clad only in his shirt, kneeling on the icy flagstones of a draughty corridor; and there, alone and shivering, he told his beads. It was there that he caught a fatal disease. When the small patient was asked why he searched for penances

beyond his strength, he replied that it was "so as to get heaven to grant me a religious vocation," so thoroughly had he become convinced that a vocation of that kind brought such intense happiness that none other could compare with it. Tuberculosis finished off poor Rafalet within a few months.

Despite all the precautions taken, a report of this mishap found its way outside and made no little stir in the town.

The Abbé Fuche and the Abbé Marededieu had one of those ecclesiastical interviews on the subject of the dead child in which there is an exercise of perfect moderation, and polite and edifying language, wielded by men of proved subtlety, that is as sharp as the blade of a dagger, and leaves within the wounds it makes a poison whose effects are felt for long afterwards. It was a duel between intelligence and religious authority fought by two consummate casuists, each of whom was able to find vulnerable spots in the other's pride and deal it devastating blows in the most unexceptionable language. The ambition of each to be a better servant of the Church and saviour of souls had made a rift between these two priests. In the name of the one and only God, of whom each man had a different conception, they would gladly have rent each other in pieces. And so they gave each other no quarter, firmly entrenched as they were, the one behind his asceticism and his reputation for austerity, the other behind the responsibilities which fall upon the director of a large community.

The Abbé Fuche would have been glad enough to reprimand severely the most thorough and uncompromising of all his subordinates. But the Abbé Marededieu, who was fully conscious of this, was on the watch for any such outbreak. He loathed the other man's broadmindedness, considering it to have a mercenary origin. He refused to believe that God could have need of anyone to resort to trickery and cunning and mean precautions in His name. He felt himself to be capable of enduring torture: but oh, ye great pioneers of the early Christian era, ye vigorous proselytizers of the Middle Ages, what a torturer he himself would have been! With what enjoyment would he, Grégoire Marededieu, have been a priest in the time of Ferdinand the Catholic, and how he would have marched, undaunted, in the

vanguard of the conquering Church of that period, of that Church which was almost military by nature, which had no fear of blows, either of receiving them or—still less—of giving them! A plague on all mawkishness and sentimentality when there is converting to be done! He was a centurion of the Christ who said: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

When the two priests, pale and thin, came face to face, the Superior opened the conversation with these words:

"I have no doubt, Father, that you are well aware that the great Loyola himself, for whom you have such admiration, was strongly opposed to any exaggerated asceticism, for the good reason that such practices deprive the believer of strength which the Church could use more profitably in other ways. Please observe that I am not casting any doubt either on your good will or the lofty standards of your work as a priest—and let me say now that I have the greatest respect for the way in which you live, which is an edifying example for us all. But I fear lest your ardour carry you too far in the penances which you urge on these children. In these matters there is an obvious need of great discretion. Bear this in mind in future."

A struggle to retain his self-control brought perspiration to the Abbé Marededieu's pale forehead as he replied:

"I know that, Father. But the time has not yet arrived for trying to discover active propensities, any obvious bent, in these children. What I am doing meanwhile is to stimulate to the utmost their capacity for submissiveness, for humility, and for sacrifice. If faith is to have a solid foundation, there must first be rigorous discipline both of mind and body. I am striving to shape and fashion minds and souls of outstanding excellence, to offer them to God."

"Minds, Father, yes, well and good. But dying boys—no, no."

"Better is he who has died at peace with his Maker than he who still lives, but amid worldly pleasures and the false standards of earth. I feel quite happy on Rafaël's account. He has chosen the better part."

"Yes, yes, Father, I agree with you! But the families with

whom I am bound to reckon do not send us their children in order that we may turn them into angels before their time. Do you see my point?"

The only answer that the Abbé Marededieu vouchsafed at first was to give his dreadful smile, in which contempt and disgust were clearly displayed. It was not until it had faded that, with a note of sarcasm in his voice, he proceeded to quote from the Gospel of St Matthew: "*It is written: For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*"

"But it is also written: *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"

"And also: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.*"

"But I will answer you, Father, and I think it is my duty to give you this reply: *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*"

"But I have a right to make a choice, Father, and this is what I have chosen: *Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven.*"

This final thrust was not parried. There was a brief silence, which was used by each man for a reckoning of the other's strength. In so doing, the Superior took into account the passionate outbursts of which he knew the Abbé Marededieu to be capable. He said to himself that the violent attitude which the abbé would have constrained him to adopt would be dangerous ground, and that one should never give battle on that chosen by the enemy. He fell back on an attitude of tolerance. He knew, moreover, that he would have the last word, that in any case he would have his triumph when the interview came to an end, a triumph so sure that he did not wish in any way to anticipate it. He said gently:

"I feel sure that you do not include me among those of whom it has been said: *Beware of men.* Now understand me, Father. I

am in charge of this establishment, and all the cares and responsibilities it entails fall upon myself. Some of these, it is true, are earthly, but it is on earth that we are living, and in the twentieth century. May I ask you to take account . . .”

“Of contingencies?”

“Of certain contingencies, Father. Yes, it would be a good thing to do so—it would even be to the interest of the beliefs we uphold.”

“*Ye cannot serve God and mammon,*” said the Abbé Marededieu, still refusing to give way.

“Now don’t let us fall into a deadlock,” the Superior said, patiently. “One *must* take account of money, which is a power all over the world. But we can do so in such a way as to make it contribute to the glory of God. That in itself is something, and compensates for any difficulties we may have encountered. Let us be obliging, Father. Spiritual well-being and the prosperity of our Colleges go hand in hand. Would you remember that?”

“Yes, I will remember it,” the abbé said, “I will remember to make lukewarm Christians, and that mediocrity forms part of our system.”

“It is a law of Nature on this earth of ours,” the Superior said. “We cannot go against it.”

At this point the interview was presumed to be at an end. At the same moment the Superior took rapidly from a drawer a sheet of manuscript and said, with a pretence of attaching no great importance to it:

“By the way, Father, somebody found this. Does it not belong to you? I thought I recognized your handwriting.”

The Abbé Marededieu, who throughout the interview had been pale, and full of sarcasm, now became livid, with distorted features. With an expression of unspeakable hatred, he tore the sheet from the Superior’s hands and immediately left the room, without uttering a word.

He went and shut himself up and set out to read over again what he himself had written. The sheet of paper was part of a long piece of writing which he had carried out in secret. It began with these words: *These pages were written by a priest in the solitude of a cell, a solitude filled with fiery ardour and deep despair.*

In that cell he often rolled upon the floor, imploring God to sustain him, imploring Him . . .

The tone of confession conveyed in these sentences, and the knowledge that they had passed through the Superior's hands, made him blush. How had he got hold of them? The Abbé Marededieu, who was always on his guard against talebearers and spies, was in the habit of keeping his papers locked up. It was extremely unusual for him to take out the merest scrap of writing, simply from fear that he might lose something. How then could he account for what had happened? . . . A locked room, a locked drawer can be opened. . . He believed those people to be capable of the meanest, the basest actions. He used the words "those people" when speaking of the other priests at Sainte-Colline, who, in his opinion, were all second-rate and full of deceit. He knew they hated him. He, in return, despised them utterly.

Then the Abbé Marededieu said to himself that he too would have his triumph. He expected that from the document which he was preparing in secret immense repercussions would follow. For this priest, while he was teaching a stern and uncompromising brand of piety, was already swerving from the beaten track of Church doctrine and heading for some new destiny, a truly astonishing destiny, of which the reader will later be enabled to take note.

CHAP III THE MIDDLE DIVISION

THE pupils of the College were split up into three divisions, the Junior, the Middle, and the Senior. Each division, placed under the authority of a prefect and a master, had its own classroom, its refectory, its dormitory, playground, and seats in chapel. Only a minimum of communication between these divisions was allowed, it being considered dangerous for boys of different ages,

and not at the same stage of development, to mix with each other. The setting of bad examples in the way of dissipation was feared, and particularly the contagion resulting from certain forms of curiosity which would undermine the purity of the youngest boys.

Just as each of the divisions possessed its own accommodation, so also did it have its special traditions and atmosphere. The Juniors were a rather pathetic lot. They were waiting to grow taller, and they envied the pupils of the higher classes, whose traits of character or peculiarities of dress they occasionally imitated. The Seniors, on the other hand, enjoyed special prestige. They had far more knowledge than the younger boys, and were allowed more freedom. Placed now on a level with grown men, they would soon be making their first appearance on the stage of life. A garden of delights was about to receive them, an open sesame wherein would be nothing but fresh discoveries, splendid adventures, and absence of all constraint.

Of the three divisions, the one which unquestionably had the worst reputation was the Middle Division, consisting of boys who were traversing that arid period known as "the awkward age," the age when the voice is breaking, and who were undergoing the spasmodic thrusts of a confused and mysterious transformation at the end of which they would reach genuine adolescence. It is true that turbulence, insolence, inattention, bragging, and laziness, were ordinarily to be found among the boys between twelve and fifteen years old. For these reasons the Middle Division enjoyed a rather scandalous reputation. They were a violent, noisy, ragging crowd.

Nevertheless, in this division, there was need to be on one's guard against the fulminations and the treacherous actions of the Abbé Jubil, the famous and redoubtable Abbé Jubil, an object both of terror and derision, who was known in secret by the two expressive nicknames of "Flabbyfoot" and "Old Slipper."

We must now give a full description of this priest, whose fanaticism was of a kind peculiar to himself. Though it had nothing in common with the Abbé Maredieu's special brand,

being of a very inferior quality, in certain cases it exercised considerable influence at Sainte-Colline, whether it resulted in submissiveness among the pupils, or whether it produced violent reactions. For the abbé's proverbial severity had provocative at least as much as repressive effects. Between this grim defender of a system which, in his hands, became either mysterious and sinister or paltry and mean, and the frank, open spontaneity of children vibrant with impatience and with repressed and violent energy, there was a constant undercurrent of strife. On one side there were threats, a power to bring unhappiness and fear, humiliation and tears. On the other, defencelessness, but merry withal, and sly, and cunning, and up to all kinds of tricks. The result of what should have been an unequal contest was never a foregone conclusion. Victory went to either of the combatants, for clever devices on one side suggested fresh ones to the other.

The fact was that the genius of the Abbé Jubil consisted in making the system, and the Commandments as well, the occasion for a war of skirmish which knew no respite. For him, education meant chastisement; a college, a convict prison. The consequence of this was—as every form of excess is apt to stimulate excessive opposition to it—that his methods, except when they were being applied to weak and yielding natures, only served to inflame the spirit of rebellion among his pupils and increase their love of a fight. This in turn gave rise to a spirit of inventiveness and resource in these boys and developed their courage, their coolness, their feeling of solidarity—in fact, the best manly qualities.

"Flabbyfoot" and "Old Slipper," then, were the expressions heard when his pupils were speaking of this master. These nicknames provide an example of the intuitive faculty which children have for rapid perception of the faults and failings of grown-up people. It is true that the great significance of the Abbé Jubil was to be found in his feet, which were a mighty pair, but flabby, soft, stealthy feet, the silent, clammy, sticky feet of a spy who creeps about here, there, and everywhere on his nefarious job. His lower limbs, whose motive power was supplied by hypocrisy and cunning, and the vile passions of the convict-warder, served to convey a man in whose mind much baseness lived, who took

delight in secret accusations, the causing of terror, and the tears of children. For in his eyes all these boys were monsters, some more disguised than others; and he thought that these young people were on the way to becoming sinister individuals, capable of the worst horrors.

It is easy to see the effect which these convictions would have when used to reinforce a doctrine based on reprisals—for the scriptures contain everything, the precepts of the avenging sword no less than those of pardon—and the abbé, who was strongly opposed to any manifestation of pity, had quickly made his choice. He administered the laws of heaven in the same way as a gendarme does those of earth, with a complete conviction that only by interpretations of that nature is the truth to be found. With some slight exaggeration (but that exaggeration will make our description clearer) the Abbé Jubil might have been described as “one of the Almighty’s policemen.” In his opinion, to administer the sacraments to the young scamps at the College was about on a par with giving jam to pigs. An imposition or a box on the ear—these were the only sacraments on which he really placed any reliance. Tirelessly and unremittingly he dealt them out, in the service of a master whom he sincerely believed he was honouring and delighting when, day by day, he offered Him a rich booty of misdemeanours which contained, in his own imagination, the germs of many a dark plot and hateful crime.

It may be said that, on the whole, the zeal of the Abbé Marededieu and the Abbé Jubil and the austerity which accompanied it, were devoted to the glorification of the same God of fear and terror, the same Prince of inexorable revenge; who will appear with rolling thunder to administer His just decrees, and will hurl into a bottomless pit of despair the unbelievers, the arrogant, the fornicators, a numberless concourse of His creatures summoned from the grave, who will constitute a living, trembling picture of the final great apothecosis of everlasting torment.

It is certainly with some reluctance that the present chronicler, while bearing in mind the undeniable spiritual distinction of a man like Grégoire Marededieu, yet ventures on a comparison between him and Victorin Jubil. The two priests had much in common in their conception of the Divine; but we must never-

theless assign to each his proper place and get a clear perception of their respective qualities. While the first would have deserved to be reckoned among the Machiavellis of Christianity, the second could never have been more than a gaoler or an obscure denouncer of heretics. A great dignitary of the Church or a mere myrmidon—those are the positions to which their respective talents would have entitled them. On the one side there was vision, with its broad outlook and political foresight; on the other, corrupt and vicious action, with its ugly contacts and its savage joys. It was Marededieu who day and night endured that moral torture which may be the accompaniment of high merit. In that dark cell in which he ruminated over an apostolic greatness to which he would never attain, and which his era denied him the slightest opportunity of reaching, he would groan and lament over his powerlessness. One guessed that he was the victim of his own fierce striving; one could not withhold from him some measure of respect.

Jubil was a different kind of man altogether. He was a mediocrity who enjoyed the calm serenity of the fool (extended in his case to the mysteries of the supernatural), entirely satisfied that he was doing good service for the College and for religion, both of which he rendered hateful, making them appear to share the essentially base, mean qualities of his own nature. His activities in God's service were such that they could have been utilized elsewhere to turn him into a cruel highway robber or a cold-blooded torturer.

For one thing is certain. People are what they are, and no career they adopt can alter their essential nature. In the exercise of a profession with a metaphysical background, the Fathers of Sainte-Colline brought to bear the same qualities and the same defects as they would have done in an entirely different calling. The only factor which gave them that unity which is conferred by a common outlook, namely, the all-pervading preoccupation with religion, was not sufficient to prevent their varying moods, or their degree of intelligence or sensibility, from determining each man's reactions and behaviour. No less than among other men, the conduct of these priests revealed weaknesses and absurdities which sometimes turned their thoughts away from

the subject which chiefly occupied their minds, their eternal salvation, or at least greatly altered the course of those human journeys which lead in time to that central point of supreme and lasting joys.

Jubil, a police inspector to the backbone, was not troubled with doubts. He had no more of these than a good policeman to whom, when on his three-thousandth night of point duty in the solitude of a big town, it would never occur that a mild case of drunkenness was anything but a crime against society. The conscientious guardian of the peace, should he surprise a belated passer-by relieving himself against a plane-tree, must forget the inescapable requirements of the renal function, the meagre cubic capacity of the human bladder, and remember one thing and one thing only, and that is, that the liquid in question may *not* be spilt in illicit places, nor indeed anywhere outside those little edifices whose rarity so unfortunately renders them inaccessible in urgent cases. To such lengths must lack of understanding go if law and order are to be preserved. The institution of punishment is the most powerful, the soundest of all institutions, both in this world and the world to come. The Abbé Jubil devoted himself wholeheartedly to the securing of that institution's triumph. Even the thought that God is a father did not put him off, for he conceived of paternity as a hereditary right to the exercise of tyranny. This conception was a legacy from the days of his childhood, when old Jubil, his father, a rough and miserly farmer in the Ardeche, had given him, up till the time of his entering the seminary, a series of sound beatings, when he would never tire of shouting at him "You loafer, you idle dog, either you'll be a curé or you'll clear out of here and go and cart manure somewhere else!"

It was probably this harsh treatment on the part of a tiller of the soil with too many children that directed Victorin Jubil to the pious life. When he pondered over his youth, the abbé was not far from thinking that he would doubtless never have become a priest without those hearty paternal thrashings. It seemed to him that those thrashings had been a blessing in disguise, a special favour which had resulted in his being summoned to carry out priestly functions by Him whose will and purpose are inscrutable.

This experience of his made the master strongly in favour of using extremely severe methods in education.

His intentions were undoubtedly praiseworthy. But his justice was of the summary kind, his behaviour mean, his instincts were harsh, and the traps he laid infamous. He would have dealt out damnation as easily as one deprives naughty children of sweets. Moreover, having been brought up in a wretched part of the country, where it was cold and the soil poor, and having been compelled at the beginning of his adolescence to choose between the rough life of a farm-hand and the chaste and earnest studies of a seminary, he deplored the easy conditions in which the pampered offspring of the rich families were allowed to grow up. He did not think that the soft treatment and enfeebling and mawkish indulgence which these children so plentifully received were at all a good thing for the young of the human species. He would always remember the tall, sunburnt peasant, an indefatigable worker, abstemious, miserly, who dealt out blows, terrible blows, on every possible occasion, using for his purpose handles of farm implements, or whips—anything that lay handy at the moment. That was good solid education if you like, with a power of persuasion behind it! Despise himself, the abbé associated divine justice with that administered by the old native of the Ardèche, his father, who was eighty-seven when he died, and still feared by everyone; who had added several acres to his bit of land after quarrelling with his neighbours, by dint of self-imposed and sordid privations.

The mind of a police inspector in the body of a peasant clad in a cassock. Such, morally and physically, was the Abbé Jubil, the master of the Middle Division, a man who was feared, but was nevertheless defied in a thousand different ways by a lot of gay young scamps who lost no opportunity of putting him in the wrong. The abbé knew this. Made for driving a plough, he stirred up the deep layer of vile tricks of which he believed a lying, greedy, impure, and lazy crowd of brats to be compounded. Bony, emaciated, constantly prowling about in darkness, he lay in ambush everywhere, even among the fetid little compartments in the privies, to find out the secrets of those rascally young con-

spirators. The Middle Division lived in terror of a sudden appearance of this tall, ill-clad phantom, which would seize frail arms in a grip of iron, and drag boys to the foot of a tree or to the Vice-Principal's room.

Slipped into his breviary, the abbé always carried with him a famous notebook, provided with a stub of pencil and in a filthy condition. This notebook was a regular catalogue of transgressions of every kind, and contained the names of every one of the seventy-three pupils in the division, and opposite each name was a varying number of small strokes, in columns at the head of which one of the following specifications appeared: *Chattering, Fidgeting, Projectiles, Impertinence, Unseemly behaviour*, etc.

Everything was noted down there, including a summary of past misdemeanours, and even—in a form of hieroglyphics—mere suspicions. To occupy too much space in these pages was a thing to be avoided. There were several young scapegraces whose ambition it was to pull down the notebook. They would have gained greatly by its disappearance, which would have got things mixed up, to the advantage of the guiltier boys. They knew that the notebook contained a record, carefully kept up from day to day, of numbers of lines given, hours of being kept in, etc., etc.

But the abbé was never parted from his famous notebook, never laid it down anywhere. No one had yet discovered what he did with it at night. He seemed to value it as much as though it were a list of his good deeds on earth, and to rely on the importance of this catalogue for tipping the scales in his favour when in due course he should appear before the ruler of heaven, that Prefect of Police, that Fouché of the universe whom he worshipped under the name of God.

The end of October that year was already rough and cold. The sort of weather known as All Saints' weather, horribly depressing, and wintry before its time, had made an all too early appearance, and was keeping the boys strictly confined to their classrooms and to their studies in general, woebegone and chilly, with no welcome warmth nor shining sunlight to turn their

thoughts to prospects of joyful escape. Nature, in mourning for her time of bud and blossom, and who was evidently in league with the masters, was keeping their attention morosely fixed on blackboards and manuals. The period of unrelieved and hopeless desolation had come round once more, with its biting blasts, its dismal twilights, and its disheartening skies, whence not a glimmer of pity nor of kindness emerged.

From the College all that the eye could see was bare brown and muddy fields, above which the birds of winter soared in deliberate, heavy flight; dark, sinister woods, dull leaden clouds, and a few dismal houses, closed; while in the far distance some patches of dirty snow were conspicuous on a hostile and forbidding horizon.

Thus imprisoned, the unhappy new boys were shivering and shedding tears of distress over the disheartening dryness of the elements of grammar, over the Greek alphabet, and the traps in the *De viris illustribus*. The elder boys, up to every dodge and as hardened as prisoners with previous convictions, thought of nothing but securing good places near the stoves, upon which they secretly cooked apples and nauseating mixtures of chocolate, butter, and gruyère cheese, stuffed with almonds and raisins, on which they regaled themselves for want of something better. The full rigour of the winter season was now beginning to make itself felt, and the only pleasure left to these boys who had perforce to stay indoors was indulgence in the greediness which keeps the body supplied with some additional amount of warmth. The all-pervading cold only made them feel the more how dreadful their situation was: the school was a mixture of a prison and an Eskimo hut. But there were some clever minds among the boys which were careful to put up some resistance to the numbness induced by this trying period, which would otherwise have given the masters too great an advantage altogether.

It was the 28th October. The pupils were now able, after a good fortnight spent in observation, to take each other's measure sufficiently well to know which were the bores, which were suspect, and to give them a wide berth. This review having been completed, they had now to turn their attention without further

delay to more serious matters; otherwise they would risk being crushed beneath the iron heel of a discipline only too well contrived. The more determined of the boys knew by experience that the steps aimed at emancipation should be taken without waiting any longer, and before the rules and regulations should have been still further strengthened by habitual and disastrous submission to them; for there is nothing so difficult as fighting against authority that has become too firmly established. And thus it was that the principal thought in these boys' minds at the beginning of each year was "to try out the profs," in order to find just how much one could get them to put up with.

This delicate task fell to the lot of a few leading, and dangerous, spirits, the little band of whom, which was very closely watched, counterbalanced the edifying group which consisted of the recognized champions of docility. Between these two extreme factions, the one exemplary, the other detestable, came the wavering, fluctuating mass of the undecided, the prudent, and the neutral, who at one moment were enjoying the benefit of concessions seized from the masters, and then, fearing trouble and complications, were turning to those pupils whose names appeared regularly in the roll of honour. Without extolling the peculiar merits of the service which the young ruffianly element was actually rendering, it should nevertheless be recognized that the forces of opposition embodied in it were helping towards the maintenance of a proper balance in a small juvenile society wherein were being moulded the characters of a generation which was getting no enlightenment whatever, even through the teaching of the masters, regarding those manly occupations which awaited it beyond the precincts of a college where the greatest care was seemingly exercised to give a distorted picture of everything that should have represented life as it actually is. And thus it was that the combative spirit, so necessary in this life, was a conspicuous characteristic of the reprobates.

The time allotted for the evening recreation was drawing to a close. Night had begun to fall, a chilly night favourable for secret deliberations. The growing darkness was intensified by the mist which hid the buildings and submerged the playground,

giving it a blurred, almost unearthly appearance, while from time to time chilly, whispering figures came into view, hard to identify from the uniformity of their capes.

The Middle Division playground showed two distinct sections. It was in the upper portion, which adjoined the peristyle of the College, that the good pupils usually stayed, those who played near their masters and had nothing to conceal, whose speech was free from coarse and improper expressions.

At the bottom of a slight declivity in the soil began the lower portion of the playground which, being some distance away, provided a safer place of refuge for the unruly element. In this lower portion, between the privies and the corner of the kitchen garden, there was a secluded spot, enclosed within a hedge and well out of sight, which despite its being out of bounds, was the fold to which the black sheep of the College invariably resorted. It was there that old scores were paid off, with bare fists, kicks, or stones. There, too, the smugglers carried on their shady traffic in articles brought into the College against all rules, and there it was that conspirators with scratched limbs, dirty noses, and inkstained fingers hatched their plot. And lastly, it was in this spot that conversations of a scabious nature took place which tended to elucidate the mystery of those alluring delights which men and women may enjoy in mutual collaboration. This was a question which was beginning to worry certain youthful minds, but it must be added that their curiosity in these matters was due more to vanity than to any real thirst for knowledge. There were some cunning boys who flattered themselves that they knew a lot about it, solely for the pleasure of boasting and of making the unenlightened stare in astonishment.

The dense fog that evening made the position of the enclosure near the kitchen garden a particularly strong one, provided only that one avoided being caught by the Abbé Jubil, who was an adept at taking advantage of this hour of growing darkness to make a sudden appearance where he was least expected. But the necessary precautions had been taken by some stout lads who fortunately were well able to take care of themselves. Two cleverly posted sentries were to give warning of any inopportune arrival. One of these was Lhumilié, who was always eager and

willing to render a service which might get him into trouble. He had been given this advice:

"If you see Flabbyfoot, yell out at once: 'Twenty-two of those niggers!' and we'll buzz off through the kitchen garden."

"Don't you worry," Lhumilié had said, whose courage and loyalty were beyond doubt, "I'll yell right enough. But you must tell me later what you've all settled, about ways of ragging."

Relying on the vigilance of their guard, the plotters went on with their deliberations. By this time they could hardly distinguish anything beyond the pale outline of each other's faces, while from the mouth of each boy as he spoke there arose a thin column of moisture.

"We must have some fun this evening though Flabbyfoot's the same dirty skunk he's always been."

"Yes, we must have some good laughs, and rag him, too."

"Like hell we must, and get our own back on him, Old Slipper!"

"We must pinch his natchook."

"We ought to think up some other tricks to play on him."

"What ones?"

"Oh, some we'll invent, of course."

"We might all try and see if we can manage the best one."

There was silence. Each boy was thinking of the risks and responsibilities which such an undertaking involved. But from out of the darkness came a voice, a loud, domineering, rather contemptuous voice.

"Of course, if there are any funks about, we don't want them here. Let 'em scoot—all the funks--along with the pi kids, the prarons, and the suckers-up!"

"I'm not a funk!" was heard from a very determined voice, which belonged to Lannudin.

"Not am I." This was Lardier.

"Not I! Not I!" came from other voices, which rang with fervour and pride.

At that moment a cry rang out "Twenty-two of those niggers!" twice repeated by the dauntless but rash Lhumilié. Taking advantage of a slight projection in the wall of the privies, the young scamps lost no time in climbing over the hedge of the

kitchen garden, where they remained on the other side, waiting to see what would happen next.

But nothing did happen, for the abbé did not come so far. Well aware that something suspicious was afoot, he had darted at Lhumilié, whose shrill voice, like that of a girl, could not be mistaken. He dragged him forcibly to the higher portion of the playground.

"But, Father, I haven't done anything! I haven't done anything, Father! Oh, I say! I say!" Lhumilié kept on repeating amidst his struggles.

They arrived at last beneath a gas jet, which shed a nasty ominous little yellow light.

"What is the meaning of that 'Twenty-two of those negroes'?" the Abbé Jubil asked, suspiciously.

"It's just a game, Father," Lhumilié said.

"What game?"

"Oh, we were just playing, that's all!"

"What at?"

"We were playing," Lhumilié answered with disarming simplicity, "at an attack by niggers in a tunnel, at night."

"Really?" asked the abbé, unable to make up his mind. "Whom were you playing with?"

"With Pinoche, Lamandin, Quaque, Lardier, Garfouillat. . ."

The Abbé Jubil hesitated. But it would never have occurred to him that a mere suspicion did not necessarily carry a sanction with it. Leaving nothing to chance, he made his decree:

"I shall keep you in for half an hour, to-morrow."

"But, Father, I didn't do anything. We were just playing. . . ."

"Get along with you!" the Abbé Jubil said. "Anyhow, it will count for the days when you *were* up to some mischief and I knew nothing about it."

He let Lhumilié go. The boy plunged into the fog and began running towards the corner by the privies. He called out, in a level tone, in the direction of the kitchen garden:

"You can come back now, you chaps, Old Slipper's legged it."

He told them about his story of the attack by negroes in a tunnel, and what his reward had been for the service he had done

them. The bell which was rung for evening school then broke in upon their talk. Dragging along as slowly as they could, they reached the spot where the Division was assembling. In the meantime the phlegmatic Quaque had had an inspiration. This boy had a pronounced taste for practical jokes carried out in the coolest possible manner, and which derive all their humour from an attitude of quiet persistence. He announced to the others, without specifying details:

"You just wait, we're going to have no end of a lark!"

It was always a strange thing to hear Quaque speak of "having a lark," so strange, indeed, that the mere thought of it made people laugh; for this boy, by reason of an amazing incongruity between his personal appearance and any activity of the kind he was proposing, diffused an atmosphere of the whimsical and the odd, of the existence of which no one would otherwise have dreamed. At the age of fourteen he displayed the impassive countenance of an old clown wearied by long years devoted to buffoonery. This profoundly dismal appearance was the only clue he provided to the existence of a native disposition that was itself profoundly comic. The irresistible effect of these peculiar qualities was due to the fact that Quaque was painfully conscious of human stupidity, and grieved over it. This melancholy person was in reality searching for some compensation for his own despairing outlook. The outward expression of his sufferings was a wry face; hence an incomparable talent for playing the fool, hence, too, the inclusion in that talent of some touching quality which, by reason of its genuineness, always aroused mirth.

This whimsical person found that evening a fine opportunity for affording himself some amusement in the presence of the whole Division, by creating a sort of quiet stir. The pupils were drawn up in two long files, preparatory to returning to their classroom. Before giving the signal, the abbé was waiting for the last remnants of frivolous behaviour to die down and complete silence to be established. A pupil then left the ranks and advanced towards him. It was Quaque, a serious and determined Quaque, but nevertheless brimming over with a somewhat fiendish delight which did not escape the notice of the rest. The scene was to be played for the special benefit of certain boys who were in the

secret, and were eagerly preparing themselves to enjoy their own share in the comedy.

"Father," said Quaque, in a very grave and sorrowful tone of voice, "that was true, what I humilić said."

"What was true?"

"That we were playing at an attack by negroes in the tunnel."

"Who asked you to speak?"

"The Father Superior said the other day in his sermon that we must always proclaim the truth without fear or favour, and not be afraid of what anyone says. So I'm telling you the truth, Father, so that everyone can get the benefit of it."

"That's all right," the Abbé Jubil said. "Now you can go back to your rank."

"So, Father, you won't punish Lhamilić, will you? Because it wouldn't be fair, as he spoke the truth."

"Mind your own business. And hold your tongue."

"Yes, Father," Quaque said, with gentle obstinacy. "So you won't be punishing him? The negroes in the tunnel—it was just a game we made up ourselves."

The delight of those boys who were in the know became too hard for them to bear. Their cheeks were all puffed out in their longing to burst into laughter, while from each boy's lip there came forth a thin, hissing, whistling sound which soon developed into a magnificent, open-mouthed smile, with the most enlivening and cheerful result. It was, needless to say, that ass Lhamilić, the boy principally concerned in the whole affair, who was the first to give out and laugh aloud.

From the very start, the Division had been on the look-out for an excuse to let itself go. A tremendous burst of hilarity was suddenly heard beneath the dimly lighted peristyle. The uproar was compounded of deep muffled roulades, shrill, quavering trills, short, sharp cries, with gusts of sound which came in violent succession with no interval of silence between them. These forbidden sounds came all from hidden mouths. A collective frenzy took violent hold of all these boys, who were stamping about in their joy and, taking advantage of the extreme confusion and disorder which prevailed for the purpose of assuaging some long-standing thirsts for revenge, were pinching

or giving each other blows. In the midst of this tumult, the most thoroughly aroused among them were hurling about the grossest insults, the most abominable scurrilities, thereby giving free rein to, and ridding themselves of, evil impulses which had been too long curbed and repressed by the restraints of the system under which they lived. The Division was behaving like a crowd which is seeing red, while in each of those small human minds a gentle, almost unconscious hope was coming to birth, a hope of witnessing at long last the suppression of that tyrant, the Abbé Jubil, who in his surprise and his fury, and temporarily overwhelmed by the suddenness and violence of this tornado, was awaiting his opportunity for revenge.

In the meantime Quaque, with a mingled look of reproof and of distress, a look which seemed to imply that he understood nothing whatever of what was taking place, was still in the midst of the ranks, and running towards the master. He took advantage of a brief lull to make known his own feelings to the abbé and express his sympathy with him.

"Well, I declare, they're all off then chump!"

And he tapped his forehead, looking mournfully at the noisy, ragging crowd as he did so. But his right eye, turning this way and that with a crafty, cunning look, and the only sign of life in that gloomy face, encouraged his friends with rapid, blinking movements of the eyelid. And he had a certain way of moving his scalp, right at the top of the cranium, which was a clear indication to those who knew its meaning:

"Oh! what a time we're having! What a time we're having!"

As an old termagant of a master, who had been dispensing fear for twenty years past, the Abbé Jubil had sometimes been plagued and worried past all bearing. Yet here was another occasion when his habitual caution had proved insufficient, so utterly unexpected were the occasions and motives of these little ruffians' wild outbreaks. Unexpected, indeed, they were this evening, with the very strange concern over the question of fair treatment which Quaque had just displayed, in a manner too virtuous to be really genuine.

The Abbé Jubil made it a point of honour not to allow himself to be ragged; this was well known, to the masters as well as to the

boys. The first and the most painful consequence, therefore, of the disorder which prevailed in the ranks was this, that the noise would certainly reach the upper story and the Fathers be thinking, with secret pleasure: "Dear me, there is Jubil with his young gentlemen out of hand!" The master even believed those people upstairs to be capable of smiling and joking on his account. It was enough to enrage a man of his stamp.

That he *was* enraged was so evident that the delightful spectacle of his impotent wrath acted as a further encouragement to the boys to shout as lustily as they could (And the hypocritical Quaque continued to be distressed and to display an indignation that grew more and more comic) The volume of sound was constantly increasing, but the abbé, whose voice could not be heard above the din, was quite helpless until he had extracted from the medley in his pocket the big horn whistle which he used for giving the signal for reassembling after country walks. But now came the climax of his misfortunes: the whistle was blocked with crumbs and dust. The abbé's fruitless efforts to extract the faintest sound from it brought a small flood of sneers and chuckles and sarcastic remarks.

At last the whistle worked. The shrill, strident screech which followed, a mild torture for the eardrums, and rendered the more piercing by the chick-pea in the whistle, had a petrifying effect on the young scamps who heard it. A deep silence fell, replete with astonishment and with fear, and also with vicious joy, for the rain of punishments which would doubtless fall upon them would never wash away the memory of this sudden and brilliant attack. The boys had won a smashing victory over Flabbyfoot.

To everybody's surprise, the abbé took no immediate sanctions. In a voice which was quiet though quivering with hatred, he gave the usual directions, and the Division returned to its classroom in perfect order—too perfect, it might be said, for there was a suggestion of irony in it. The abbé walked between the two files, with a very sombre face, pondering over the insult he had received, and coldly and deliberately preparing his revenge.

In the classroom, when the prayer had been said and everyone

was seated, the Abbé Jubil, having secured attention by means of the customary sharp tap on his desk, and without any allusion to the circumstances responsible for his decision, made this announcement:

"The whole Division will forgo recreation, to-morrow at ten o'clock.

A faint murmur arose among all the well-behaved pupils, who were protesting their innocence. The abbé broke in upon it.

"I can't help that," he said. "The righteous must pay for the unrighteous. Or else you must arrange among yourselves to let me know which of you are guilty."

Again he tapped. Then, still standing, and pointing to left and right at the empty space between his raised chair and the front row of desks, he called out:

"Quaque and Lhumilié, come here."

The two boys left their bench and went slowly forward. Quaque made a great display of pained astonishment, the reproachful astonishment of one who is fundamentally fair-minded and just, and is now seeing iniquity wrought before his very eyes. Two or three twitches of his scalp announced to his comrades that despite unfavourable circumstances he was going to make another attempt.

"I didn't do anything wrong," he declared. "It was to obey the Father Superior, who told us about it in his sermon . . ."

"It's true, Father, we were playing at niggers in the tunnel," Lhumilié added, seized once more with a longing to laugh.

For the third time the sharp tap was heard, and judgment was pronounced.

"Kneel down, both of you, with the dictionaries."

The Abbé Jubil had invented a form of torture the effects of which were only felt after an interval of time. It was this. The victim had to kneel down and stretch his arms out in front of him, on a level with the shoulders. On that pair of arms two heavy Latin dictionaries were laid; and the boy had then to remain quite motionless, with no possibility of subsiding on to his heels or taking any form of rest. Any shifting of his position meant further punishment.

To start with, all would go well, and there was even something

rather funny about this form of punishment, with its suggestion of a game. But after a short time the weight of the dictionaries had a horribly painful effect on the knees, while the shoulder-joints began to lose their strength. Then, later, came the inevitable moment when the arms gave out. The boy was at the master's mercy.

Lhumilié's wild laughter had its counterpart in his tears—torrential tears whose headlong course made small ravines in a face which itself was dreadfully distorted. The boy wept as he laughed—irresistibly. He was an extraordinary contortionist, an amalgam of pathos and comedy alike; and whether it were gaiety that he felt, or whether it were despair, he brought the same force of conviction to bear upon it. As it was well known that he went straight from one extreme to the other, he was always relied upon to provide farcical displays of the most surprising and unexpected nature. High tragedy, and the joys of running wild, held alternate sway in that feeble brain. If it were gaiety that undoubtedly held the upper hand, Lhumilié's tremendous sorrows produced, by sheer contrast, a quite overwhelming effect; for this eccentric schoolboy was in the habit of uttering, no matter where he might be, the most heartrending lamentations, the shrillest yells, these cries being accompanied by ineffable grimaces which were enjoyed by all who witnessed them as entertainment of quite exceptional excellence. This spectacle provided an occasion for compassionate—and loud—exclamations, so that this chorus of sympathy soon assumed the aspect of a revolt. The Division looked to these displays to provide them with the finest amusement. And thus it was that from the punishment given to Lhumilié was born the hope of a splendid bit of revelry which would be decidedly at the Abbé Jubil's expense.

This hope was realized. Less than a quarter of an hour after his punishment had begun, Lhumilié was making it plain, with sighs and spasmodic jerks, that something strange was taking place within him, something that would brook no delay, that was wholly dreadful, the origin of which was not hard to guess. (The slightest emotion resulted, with him, in a sudden irresistible renal activity.) As these demonstrations left the abbé quite

unmoved, Lhumilié added this request, while he kept repeating spasmodically, and in louder and louder tones:

"I want to leave the room, Father . . . to leave the room. . . ."

But the abbé remained deaf to his entreaties—savagely deaf to them. Then Lhumilié, still holding his dictionaries which were swaying dangerously, began to move forward as a suppliant on his knees, aiming at a spot exactly opposite the abbé's chair, where he hoped to be in a better position to attract his tormentor's attention and soften his heart. All the pupils, their eyes fixed on the pitiful little acrobat, were waiting for something to happen. What did happen was that Lhumilié uttered a cry of anguish.

"Father, I can't hold out any longer!"

At the same moment he dropped his dictionaries, which fell with a crash, and having collapsed on to his heels and holding his thighs, he twisted and writhed like a worm. The whole room burst out laughing. But with disastrous results, for laughter aroused in Lhumilié the same impulse to imitation as yawning does in most people. At the height of his distress he burst into laughter—a shrill, squalling laughter, supremely irritating—but continued nevertheless to writhle and twist about and to display all the symptoms of unbearable suffering. A very incarnation of wrath, the Abbé Jubil rose from his chair. In short sentences which fell like hammer blows, he delivered judgment.

"One hundred lines, Lhumilié. Two hundred lines, Lhumilié. Three hundred lines."

But Lhumilié had ceased to see, to hear, or to understand. A choking, grotesque little figure, he kept crying out.

"Let me leave the room, Father. Leave the room. . . ."

And the woeful, ludicrous little creature's laughter grew louder, his writhings increased. And behind him the whole classroom was seething with frantic, half-crazed delight. And the Abbé Jubil was doling out lines at random, by the hundred.

It was at this point that Lhumilié, haggard and pale, leapt to his feet and ran towards the exit, shouting in tones which showed a state of utter panic: "the privies, Father, the privies. . . ." He vanished, leaving the door open.

On his return, Lhumilié was favoured with the pleasing total

of five hundred lines, together with a threat of severer punishment if there were any more of his idiotic behaviour. This threat, however, failed to prevent his lack of strength from betraying him. Twenty minutes later Lhumilié let his dictionaries fall once more. The laughter which shook the classroom only made this lapse seem worse, by giving it the character of a challenge. Pale, and without uttering a word, the Abbé Jubil stepped down from his chair, went over to the culprit, and grasped him firmly by the ear.

"Kneel down!" he said.

Then the abbé, holding his victim by the ear, drew him towards the door. Lhumilié was dragging himself along miserably on his knees, as though he were a legless being, and with his neck twisted round, his eyes half out of their sockets, and his nose badly in need of wiping, he kept yelling with dramatic emphasis:

"Ooooh! Ooooh! Ooooh!"

He fell forward, started again, then fell once more. The abbé continued to drag him along, relentlessly, to the persistent accompaniment of Lhumilié's cries. It would be reasonable to suppose that these were more violent than his actual sufferings warranted. But the boy in his torment had not forgotten that the abbé was not entirely within his rights in laying hands on him, corporal punishment being forbidden in principle. And his comrades, in sympathy with one of their own number, had remembered this too. A cry of indignation was heard and quickly taken up by others; and in an instant the whole room was repeating it with rhythmical emphasis:

"Brute! Brute! Brute!"

Mingled with these cries a few others could be distinctly heard, cries of "Skunk!"—agreeably conspicuous amid the welter of sound. The classroom was jolted and shaken by dictionaries which were collapsing and falling to the floor on every side. Lids of desks and feet under tables added to a din like that of a bombardment. Various missiles flashed through the air, and some well chewed pellets found their way to the ceiling and stuck there. From one of these, at the end of a string, there hung a black dancing doll with enormous feet, whose uncouth profile

reminded one of that which belonged to a certain sinister and vindictive master. . . .

All this lasted, unfortunately, but a short time. But it might well be said that this splendid demonstration was in every respect a success. A success and a great consolation! An exploit which redounded to the honour of the Middle Division!

In a word, it was a glorious and memorable day, and a signal failure for the Abbé Jubil.

A failure indeed, despite his having later taken severe measures of repression. If the abbé had ever stopped a moment to ask himself which side would be able to claim victory, a glint in those boys' eyes, with its faint suggestion of a jeer, would have given him exact information on this point. He knew only too well those will-o'-the-wisps of mockery which flitted over the rows of benches at the precise moment when all the most troublesome of the boys were displaying a docility and an eagerness over their work that were entirely abnormal.

In actual fact, although the abbé had succeeded in carrying off the situation, he knew well enough that his wretched little scapegraces were under no illusions, and that they regarded both the insult and the setback which he had received as a victory for themselves. It occurred to him that there must be some young rascal with more cunning than the rest, an agitator who had steered clear of punishment, and whose escape would be strengthening his authority. But who could it be? . . .

The master racked his brains and kept a sharper look-out than ever. There were two or three other boys whom he suspected of being the ringleaders. They were, however, only assistants, and the abbé's suspicions were wide of the mark; for believing him to be harmless, he had left out of his calculations one of the most obnoxious boys in the whole Division, Pinoche, the famous Hubert Pinoche, prince of dunces who, girt in his armour of inertia and of an indifference that was in fact a mere pretence, led a peaceful, easy life at Sainte-Colline, where he was indulged to a very special extent.

The reasons for this exceptional treatment will be learned later. The exploit which won Pinoche these privileges dated back to the preceding year. The said privileges amounted in actual fact

to nothing more than a reformatory system. But Pinoche did not mind in the least; he lived very much at ease, and his chief concern was to assure his own continuance in that happy state.

CHAP. IV: PINOCHE THE DUNCE

“WHO was it who said just now ‘St Joseph was no fool’?”

The master of the fourth form, the Abbé Menème, repeated his question without receiving any answer. In the silence, heavy with threats, which fell upon the class, the effect of the expression “no fool,” uttered by the master and applied to St Joseph, was startling, the more so in that it occurred during a lesson of religious instruction. The pupils in the fourth form evidently made deplorable use of the religious teaching they received; and the end of it would be that St Joseph would have his revenge, through the medium of someone on earth. He is a good-natured, indeed, an obliging saint, but “no fool”—well, it sounded rather shocking. . . .

In a touching display of repentance every head was bent low over the sacred story, particularly in the back rows of the class, where the hardened idlers sat, who are always the first boys to be suspected. It was, in fact, in their direction that the Abbé Menème turned the glint of his flashing spectacles.

“Very well, then,” he said at last, “the two back rows will be kept in on Thursday.”

It was then that some mean-spirited youth at the back of the room called out:

“It was Pinoche said it!”

“You dirty rotter!” was heard in an indignant voice—possibly Pinoche’s.

“Filthy sneak!” came from another voice.

“Hooo! hooo! hooo!” Other voices were heard in chorus, their owners delighted at the opportunity of making a noise.

Then the tell-tale shouted:

"Father, Pinoche threw some ink at me."

"Liar!"

"Funk!"

"Hooo! hooo! hooo!" came the voices, this time on a higher note.

There was a violent scuffling of feet beneath the tables, and the young sneak, who had at length been discovered, gave a howl of pain.

All this had happened within a few seconds, in a sudden whirling eddy of hidden forces not unlike the first stirrings of a riot. The Abbé Menèmc lifted the lid of his desk and then let it fall heavily. In his anger, his spectacles almost danced on his large, prominent nose stained with tobacco and reddened by alcoholic potations. He put on his biretta and thrust his hands into the collar of his cassock. The fourth form knew that a settlement of accounts was imminent. Silence reigned once more. But a strange noise suddenly broke in upon it: the pupil Lhumilié had just been seized by a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Yet this was emphatically not the moment for it. . . .

"Lhumilié, you will conjugate three times the verb 'to lack the sense of what is fitting, on every possible occasion.'"

The only effect of this punishment on Lhumilié was to provide a stimulant for his wild laughter. Red in the face, his cheeks puffed out by violent exhalations and dripping with saliva and tears, with a wild look in his eyes, this wretched child, writhing in the grip of a hilarity that was barely sane, was a refreshing, welcome sight for a class through which there flowed currents of a secret, forbidden delight and one which was sweet to the taste, enjoyed as it was in the presence of a master giving religious instruction, for whom events were proving altogether too strong.

So great were Lhumilié's efforts to contain himself that the physical urgencies which stirred within him changed their direction and left his body in the guise of a small thin sound, a little compressed, high-pitched sound, prolonged, and marvelously fined down as it made its escape, though admirably resonant and clear. Knowing exactly whence this sound had come, the class recoiled with delight; and prompted by this tiny

explosion which had miraculously occurred under the very noses of the New Testament saints, threw all restraint to the winds and plunged into the ecstasies of a tumultuous uproar.

"Bung off, Lhumilié—to the privies, and buck up about it!"

But at that very instant the master's desk became the instrument of the thunders of his wrath. The Abbé Menème cried aloud:

"Look here, you will conjugate that verb six times, Lhumilié. Six times, you understand? And in Latin."

At that, Lhumilié's wild laughter stopped dead. His features, which a moment earlier had been transformed by a strange and artificial kind of merriment, now bore an expression of helpless amazement.

"What's the Latin for that, Father?"

"Look it up in Quicherat."

If the pupil Lhumilié lacked a sense of what befits the occasion, the Abbé Menème had, for his part, a sense of logic and method in abundance. He reverted to St Joseph.

"It was you, Pinoche, who said 'St Joseph was no fool'?"

The pupil Pinoche served as a kind of yardstick at the College in cases where degrees of idleness or frivolity or general worthlessness were in question. He was the ne'er-do-well *par excellence*, the stubborn, hopeless species of dunce, one of those immovable creatures, firmly rooted in their contempt for all forms of instruction, whom neither reproof nor punishment can arouse from a state of blissful stagnation, and who are no less at ease in infamy and squalor than was Job on his dunghill, and from their mound of filth, bound in the pillory of disgrace and with the dunce's cap on their heads, still set at defiance all those who would fain teach them, punish them, or cast out their devils.

Doubtless there were other hopeless idlers at the College, as, for example, Nusillon, Lamandin, Gamache, Maliboin, and Chachuat, whose reputation was firmly established and who were no mean exponents of impudence and sloth. But Pinoche surpassed them all; for he was incorrigible, a cynic, a boy whose only answer to reproof was an insolent sneer, who had a marked taste for going off to find solitude and leisure in the nauseous

surroundings of the privies, to which he made constant pilgrimage, holding his stomach as he did so; for he had a prodigious faculty for pretending that he suffered from colic, enteritis, indigestion—indeed, every kind of ailment that will enable a sly and determined young devil to escape from his lessons and lounge about at his ease, beyond his masters' clutches, in the least-known holes and corners of the school.

Besides all this, Pinoche was allied to the brute in its primitive strength, a brute which certainly had still to attain its full development in the matter of height and weight, in the number and variety of its cunning tricks and the ways and means of putting them into effect; but which, at the age of thirteen, had already reached the zenith of brutal instincts in their most complete and magnificent form. Ceaselessly, unwearyingly, Pinoche was given the prospect of reformatory, prison, and penal servitude, the only logical phases between his birth and hell. But a sneering chuckle was all that this produced; unless, in a suave and gentle tone, he should utter these words which expressed a feeling that was genuine and sincere: "You can go to blazes for all I care." Otherwise he endured insults as readily as a saint does torture, and with even more cheerfulness, for he seemed to have an odd, voluptuous relish for the hours when he was kept in or standing in a corner, and safely preserved from all contact with the well-behaved and pious children, for whom he obviously felt a great aversion.

Already there had been numerous discussions as to the advisability of dismissing Pinoche from an establishment to which he was a disgrace. Many times had meetings been held on his account between the Father Superior, the Bursar, and the Vice-Principal, and also Father Tartinon, the senior member of the staff and adviser to the College by reason of his great experience and outstanding theological attainments. Unhappily there were very strong reasons, in which finance and the good name of a distinguished teaching community were involved, that prevented any steps being taken for Pinoche's dismissal. And so it was that this boy, who lived in an aura of disgrace and shame, remained faithful to a College where he enjoyed a celebrity which was nothing less than deplorable.

It was a singular piece of artlessness on the part of the Abbé Menème to put any sort of question to Pinoche. Apart from the moments at which he was supposed to be saying his lessons, when his answers were exactly nil, this boy's invariable reply on every other occasion was "No." He answered "No" in the same way as the majority of the other pupils answered "Yes," on principle, in order that there should be the clearest possible distinction between his own intellectual and moral position and that of his comrades, who were all more or less inclined to a submissiveness which would have befitted a supporter of slavery. When asked, therefore, whether he had made any comment on the earthly life of St Joseph, he replied firmly:

"No!"

"Pinoche, you are lying!" the Abbé Menème declared.

"No," said Pinoche.

"Yes, you are. Besides, your friends heard you. Who was it who said: 'It was Pinoche'?"

"It was Chuitte, Father," Patrigot answered.

"Be quiet, Patrigot, no one is asking you. Was it you, Chuitte?"

"Yes, Father," said Chuitte, who was a mean-spirited boy and was jealous of the dunce. "And what's more, Pinoche called me a dirty rotter."

"Not true," Pinoche said, laconically and as though this discussion had nothing to do with him.

"You see, Pinoche?" said the Abbé Menème.

"And Sarclier kicked me hard in the leg," Chuitte cried, now sobbing pitifully.

"Oh, I like that!" Sarclier cried out, with pretended indignation.

"Be quiet, Chuitte," said the Abbé Menème, "Sarclier will be punished. . . . Lhumilié, if you keep on laughing like an imbecile, I shall put you outside. . . . Silence, please! . . . So now, Pinoche, it is proved that you are lying."

"Why should I lie?" Pinoche asked.

"Because you always do. Because . . ."

"I don't care a damn for St Joseph!" Pinoche declared, in a tone of complete conviction.

This may have been an attempt on Pinoche's part at self-justification. Perhaps he wished to convey that his feeling of indifference where St Joseph was concerned was so complete that he had no reason for speaking of the Father by adoption, either favourably or otherwise. However, one never knew, with Pinoche. . . . But one thing alone seemed certain. the choice of words was bad, unsuitable for the purpose for which they had been used. The whole class gave vent to an "Oh!" of horror, which was continued in an immense crescendo. This wholesale reprobation made his own duty plain to the Abbé Menème. He pointed to the door.

"Outside, Pinoche!"

Delighted as a general rule at any opportunity for getting into the open air, Pinoche would make for the door with the greatest eagerness, and there would be no necessity to repeat the injunction. On this occasion, for some unknown reason he changed his mind.

"No!" he said, firmly.

At the same time he huddled himself together over his desk, with his head sunk between his shoulders, his elbows stuck out and his legs pressed against the bench, with the evident intention of resisting by every means within his power. In his dull, boorish features was depicted the sly, irritating obstinacy of the brainless fool, whose convictions are like an impregnable fortress. And now, suddenly, a spirit of defiance and of blasphemy laid hold of him. Staring insolently at the Abbé Menème, he made a diabolical grimace at him and uttered this cry:

"Croâ, croâ, croâ, croâ . . ."

It was the infamous cry, the vile, despicable cry which certain poor unhappy godless children, schoolboys unredeemed, were apt to shout in the streets of the town on meeting those boys from good Catholic families, the hallowed pupils of Sainte-Colline. Thus did Pinoche, with impious rejoicing, betray the institution which maintained him.

There was indeed no form of excess, where Pinoche was concerned, that might not be expected from him, but even so, no one could have foreseen these cries of "Croâ," which were regarded at the College as the rallying-cry for some Satanic

revolt. The whole class was petrified, in a state of utter amazement, in which this time there was no remnant of pretence. Alphonse Bigotin, the clever, hardworking pupil, the saintly model of the virtues of Christian boyhood, thinking that the Devil had just taken possession of Pinoche, made a sweeping sign of the Cross and hastened with all speed to get at his scapulary, which hung on his chest, next the skin. There was a terrible silence, as of the Day of Judgement. All the pupils, including the unrepentant young scamps, were looking anxiously in the master's direction, wondering by what means St Joseph and the honour of Christianity would be avenged, what St George would come to lay low the depraved and wicked Pinoche. The archangel deputed by heaven for this task was the Abbé Menème himself.

This massive priest was the most moderate of ecclesiastics, as far removed by nature as possible from those tormenting scruples which are so destructive and emaciating to the great mystics. Here on earth, he calmly awaited his time in Paradise, never doubting his right thereto, seeing that he never gave way to any form of sensual indulgence or riot of the imagination. Liesses of tripe and onions, a stew with carrots and Reblochon cheese, dishes of which he was inordinately fond, constituted his principal excesses, on the days when this particular food was served in the Fathers' refectory. On those occasions he treated himself to a few extra bumpers of red wine and a good glass of Buchey, of which he always kept in his room a small supply which came from his family.

But one cannot condemn a good Christian because he lacks the courage to be frugal. A God of bounty would assuredly not do that. And thus it was that the Abbé Menème felt quite sure of going to heaven, and this conviction brought him a pleasant serenity, in which there may have been no yearning, heavenward flights of heart or mind, but which equally excluded those virtuous but sudden and impulsive actions by which the elect, who think that nothing is forbidden them, sow seeds of discord among their contemporaries. Nevertheless, the master of the fourth form was a man, and a full-blooded one at that, and quite

capable at times of becoming enraged, and even, as on this occasion, violently so.

Scarcely had the young rebel ceased from shouting his "Croâ, croâ, croâ," when the Abbé Menème, with his fifteen stone, literally bounded from his chair and hurled himself at the insolent boy with the strength and speed of the earthquakes which brought Sodom of old to destruction. In this speed there was certainly a touch of the supernatural; for without having once taken breath the abbé found that his impetus had borne him to the farther end of the room, where his hand, directed without doubt by an order from on high, swooped down upon the dunce's cheek with formidable strength. Pinoche, pale on one side of his face and red on the other, was aghast at what had happened. Taking advantage of his dismay, the abbé tore him from his bench and dragged him towards the door.

But Pinoche was the possessor of the toughest noddle in the whole College. His faculty for taking blows and powers of recovery therefrom were nothing short of marvellous; and this is of the greatest importance to a confirmed idler, who is in a constant state of warfare against everyone else. When a few feet away from the door, Pinoche suddenly began to struggle and to cry out that he was being murdered; and he succeeded in landing on the master's shin-bones a particular well-aimed blow from his heel.

Pain now compelled the Abbé Menème to relax his hold, and the class was within an ace of seeing the wicked triumph over the just. Happily the master was able to seize the wicked pupil by the hair and hold him while the door was being opened. He then pushed him outside, shutting behind him a leaf which Pinoche pulled back from the other side so violently that a pane of glass in it was smashed. Through this improvised aperture Pinoche cried out, with the presence of mind which he always brought to bear when in a tight corner, and thereby disclaiming all responsibility:

"There you are—now he's broken the glass! Well done."

The young scoundrel dared even to associate heaven itself with his wicked behaviour. He added, triumphantly:

"God has punished him!"

Then threats followed.

"You great coward, you just wait and see what my father'll do to you!"

Next came this clever, if false, statement:

"If I wanted to suck up by sneaking, I could tell who it was that said 'St Joseph was no fool'! Yes, I could! But I'm hanged if I want to!"

And finally:

"Down with all curés!"

Avenged for the time being, and quite satisfied with his exploit, Pinoche went off silently along the corridor, crawling on all-fours as he passed the doors of the other classrooms to avoid being discovered; for his intention was to go and potter about a little, until the bell rang, in the kitchen garden, a spot which was out of bounds to the boys and consequently a haven of delight.

With all the cunning of a Red Indian on the warpath (a stimulating comparison which the boys liked to remember when embarking on some dangerous adventure) Pinoche set out to make his way along the whole of the central group of buildings, keeping close to the pillars of the peristyle. It was a route full of snares, where one was in danger of awkward encounters with any of the Fathers, who could ask what one was doing there; for the presence of a pupil in the corridors during school hours must always appear unusual.

There were, it is true, certain of the Fathers who either from leniency or indifference did not worry about anything that took place outside the sphere of their own immediate responsibilities. But it would have been difficult for Pinoche to lie to the Superior or the Vice-Principal in an attempted explanation of his absence from the Abbé Menème's class, when that priest was holding forth on the subject of the Holy Family and the quiet virtues of Joseph, the gentle patriarch with the fleur-de-lys. And at this hour, moreover, it was highly probable that that knave, the Abbé Jubil, was prowling about there with his stealthy, slippered feet, for this maniac never rested from his pursuit of wrong-doers, the young limbs of Satan, on whose account he worked overtime, if so he might swell the total of those earthly expiations

which are so delectable to a Deity to whom the impious arrogance of His creatures is a constant offence.

Advancing warily, Pinoche then actually caught sight, between two pillars, of a lengthy shadow cast by a well known and alarming figure. There he was, at his usual post, prepared for ambush. Pinoche stopped dead, concealed himself behind another pillar, and reviewed the situation. Two roads of escape were open to him. He could either run down the Senior Division playground, go round the chapel, and come back by the lower end of the Middle Division playground, a journey entirely in the open which would expose him to the view of the whole College. Or else he might go up to the dormitory by the main staircase on the left on the pretext of having forgotten a handkerchief, which would allow him to pass through the entertainment hall and come downstairs again by the other staircase, at the bottom of which lay the passage leading to the linen room.

Pinoche chose the latter alternative. But there was not a moment to be lost, the staircases between the ground floor and the first story being extremely risky from his point of view. Pinoche crammed his beret down over his ears and took off his shoes. He then darted to the foot of the stairs and listened intently. Apparently the road was clear. Thinking that his escape was now assured, he was unable to resist the pleasure of playing a trick on the Abbé Jubil whom, so far as old scores remained to be paid off, he regarded as being his debtor on a considerable scale. Using his hands to act as a megaphone, he shouted, in the direction of the shadow

"Cuck ooo! I saw you, you old raga'nuffin!"

The abbé darted from his hiding-place like a watchdog from his kennel. But he failed to see the little triangle of an eye which was the only visible object as it peered round the corner of the wall behind which Pinoche was taking note of the effect he had produced. Satisfied with the excellent results obtained, he then flew up the stairs as lightly as a feather. On the landing of the first story he came near to disaster. A door opened, and Pinoche, with his head bent downwards, narrowly escaped a collision with one of the Fathers, who cried out: "Hullo there! I say! I say!" Pinoche, as will be readily supposed, did not

waste one second of time either in explanations or excuses. He darted away at even greater speed, in urgent quest of the landing on the second floor, leaving the Father nothing but a glimpse of the seat of an anonymous pair of breeches, two legs bestirring themselves with furious energy, and a couple of shoes carried at arm's length and waving back and forth like a pair of oars and aiding that desperate upward flight; which, however, needed no such haste, for the abbé's weighty paunch would have rendered hopeless any attempt at pursuit. Father Diot, the Head of the Senior Division, smiled as he watched the young rascal disappear.

"Like a little rabbit!" he murmured. "Exactly like a little rabbit. . . . My goodness, how nimble one is at that age!"

He then made a sweeping sign of the Cross and opened his breviary, which he decided to go and read under the peristyle, walking about for the good of his health. He made his prayers an occasion for taking a little exercise. His blood was thickening, he was conscious of putting on too much weight, and he felt a distressing desire to sleep after each meal, which troubled him a great deal when he had to supervise the pupils' studies, at the beginning of the afternoon. He came from a family whose members died of apoplexy at about the age of sixty: first came a mild attack which seemed negligible; then a second one, more serious; and after the third, it was a case for a coffin. He felt himself threatened by sudden death from high blood pressure. This danger kept him constantly thinking about the state of grace, that passport for eternity.

Having halted a moment on the second floor to recover his breath, Pinoche crossed the dormitory and the entertainment hall without hindrance. He obtained a handkerchief from Sister Philomena at the linen room, and then went down the main staircase on the right. The foot of this staircase was close to the Middle Division playground. By skirting the edge of this, as far as the enclosure of the privies, there was easy access to the kitchen garden without running much risk.

Pinoche was just about to approach the playground by way of the gymnasium yard when he suddenly made a change of plan. He had just observed, by the retaining wall of the refectories, a small, rather broken-down hut the chimney of which was smok-

ing in a peculiar way, in puffs which the wind was beating down, and reminding him of an old man's pipe. (Pinoche's paternal grandfather, an obstinate old driveller, smoked enormous pipes from morning till night, which compared with other pipes as a Dutch stove would with ordinary systems of heating.) The sight of this hut made our young sinner feel that he wanted to pay a visit to Father Bricole.

There was a little priest at the College of Sainte-Colline whose age it would have been impossible to guess. He was gnarled and shrivelled, and when he smiled, his thin, withered face broke into a thousand wrinkles; and by some strange marvel the smile, pure and charming, which appeared in that rugged face shone with the matchless radiance of youth, and was a magnet to animals and children alike. By his hand God fed the little birds. Pigeons, sparrows, and lizards followed him in procession, followed in his footsteps which brought them nourishment, his footsteps strewn with crumbs. With him tearful little outcasts, boys rebuked and overcome with shame, found a ready welcome, for, humble himself, he loved hearts free from pride, and his obedience to the saying *Judge not* was literal and strict. This behaviour made him appear a little ridiculous, giving the impression that he was a weakling. But his fresh purity was a well-spring of tenderness to which from time to time a few young sorrowful creatures came to quench their thirst, and then leave the queer little hut feeling somewhat comforted after an hour spent there in a kindly atmosphere where the slightest sign of unhappiness was enough to cancel any wrong they might have done.

No one knew the real name of this unusual person, for everybody—even the other priests—spoke of him always as Father Bricole, and under no other name. As a fitter and mender, working in wood, leather, and metals, he pottered about and did odd jobs. Son of a wheelwright of Nevers, he had worked humbly and conscientiously as a rural artificer before taking orders. He wore now the cassock as in his youth he had worn a leather apron at his anvil. This rustic workman felt it to be a worthy occupation involving no danger to other people, to

handle files and planes and crankshafts, but he would never have dared to work on human souls, or delicate and sensitive boyish minds, for which he felt too much respect and too much pity. With little or no capacity for teaching, and still less capable of the harshness and severity which are at the bottom of all education, he was looked upon as a *minus habens* for whom work had to be found as opportunity offered. With some knowledge of house-painting, plumbing, zinc-work, and bricklaying, he saved the community money which would otherwise have been spent on the employment of workmen. Besides this, he repaired footballs, stilts, racquets, and wooden shoes, and lent a hand in all sorts of jobs. At a very early hour each morning, having said his Mass, he would go off and shut himself up in his hut, whence good honest brave sounds of a craftsman's tools issued forth till evening. In that obscure corner of his he was banished and forgotten. To some extent his position at Sainte-Colline was comparable with that of the village idiot. He was treated by the Fathers with haughty condescension, the outcome of that vanity in the teaching profession from which university graduates are very seldom exempt.

It was, in reality, a grave mistake to give this manual worker's merits so little scope, to keep him in such a humble position, and there were certain pupils who were well aware of this. Though his appearance was insignificant and he lived in obscurity, Father Bricole was a precious fount of consolation for those in distress, for sad young outcasts for whom conformity with the system was too hard to achieve. Here indeed was the true Samaritan, the sincere and faithful disciple whose whole heart was given to the carrying out of the behest *Suffer little children to come unto me*. In that ramshackle little hut, built, almost apologetically, close to the shed where refuse was cast away, was to be found the most vital, genuine, helpful and, all things considered, the best of all boons and blessings in the College, the gentle reviving warmth of a love freely bestowed, whose essence was pure and uncorrupted by the faintest thought of an authority to be preserved, by the least trace of an adviser's self-importance. A poor beggar of a priest who worked as a labourer and was snubbed by his equals kept alive that flame whose welcome warmth gave fresh

courage each year to some twenty boys with bruised and battered feelings whom, without that warmth, the hard conditions of life at the College would perhaps have chilled and depressed beyond recovery.

There were a few Fathers who did sincerely strive to bring understanding and sympathy to bear upon the sorrows and anxieties of childhood (the Abbé Biboux, for example, and the Abbé Nolin, master of the seventh form). But they knew the need of maintaining their authority, and they had many fits of impatience and of anger too. And at the same time there were twenty boys who were saved from despairing of the future because the world contained a Father Bricole of whom nobody took any account, a poor little Father Bricole, shut up all alone in his hut, at the farthest, the least decorative, and the least frequented corner of the whole of the buildings.

How did he manage, this exile, to do so much good? That was the mystery about him. It may have been because he had a feeling of great compassion—a feeling which in no way belittled its objects, for he let it be clearly understood that he regarded himself as being on the same level as the most pitiable members of the pitiable human race—and because he proved by his own example that, in a humble position which is piously accepted, one may feel both assurance and joy. Happiness flowed out from him, a peaceful, unruffled kind of happiness, never disturbed by moods, or by considerations of personal interest, or ambition. The solemn, ponderous attitude which some of the other Fathers adopted, as though they had been made repositories of the highest wisdom, seemed to him to be futile, mean, an example of the sin of pride. His only ambition was that his own life should follow as closely as possible the pattern of that which was lived by the Divine visionary who was the friend of the poor humble people of Tiberias, and had himself also grown to manhood at a carpenter's bench, in a small obscure town.

He was keenly alive to all that is pure, or moving, or sincere, and anything outside these categories held no place in his thoughts. He was neither teacher nor preacher; to have used a threat would have been impossible for him; nor would he ever have aspired to the fame of those saintly men who have brought

lustre to the Church's history. And yet, in his own way, he wrought miracles. The light of that love and charity which filled him shed its gentle beams on others. That atmosphere which he radiated drew an eager response, from hardened sinners in the form of repentance, from the harassed and tormented in renewed strength of purpose. This slighted person had the gift of all those who are truly inspired—that of making the presence of God a reality to others, of a God who is compassionate, tender-hearted, simple, a God who needs no ceremonial for our approach to Him, a God who could never have declared that unruly children are deserving of hell; but who, on the contrary, cherished them, would have held them, before all others, pressed close to that suffering heart of His, to that side pierced by the spear of a poor half-demented executioner, one of those wretched men on whose behalf was uttered that sublime cry of pity: *They know not what they do.*

"They know not what they do." That is what the gentle Father Bricole seemed always to be saying as he welcomed people with a glance from his small, bright eyes, the colour of forget-me-not, with their gay, jolly expression. Far removed from the bustle and stir, the baseness and dishonesty of the world at large, he plied his tools in his little shed, where he lived on the friendliest of terms with his God, waiting till someone should come to fetch him for some urgent repair, or the face of some urchin in tears come and press itself against the window of his hovel.

Pinoche entered the hut.

"Good morning, Father Bricole," he said.

"Good morning, my Pinoche," Father Bricole said. "Come along and warm yourself."

"I've been a fool, you know," said Pinoche.

"You've been turned out, then, have you? Why don't you behave properly?"

"It bores me stiff!" Pinoche said. "I simply can't help it, I've just *got* to play the fool."

"And what about God, Pinoche? What must He be thinking of you?"

Pinoche thought a moment.

"I expect He made me like that! And how about you, Father Bricole? Were you good, at school?"

"Not always, Pinoche, not always. . . ."

"Well, there you are, then! I'll be good myself when God wants me to, that's my idea."

"You must help God a little, Pinoche."

"I can't imagine God wanting *me* to help Him—a boy like me. That'd be all topsy-turvy!"

Pinoche thought again, then asked this question.

"Is it true, Father Bricole, that the greatest ruffians have become the greatest saints, sometimes?"

"Yes, it has happened, Pinoche. Would you like to be a saint?"

"My goodness, no," Pinoche said, earnestly. "That wouldn't be much fun. I'd rather be an aviator, or a millionaire."

"Yes, but if God wants to make a saint of you, later on, He won't give you any choice in the matter."

"Oh well, then, what's the use of talking about it? One just has to wait. . . . I say, Father Bricole, can I rummage about a bit?"

"Yes, that's all right, Pinoche. But don't take anything without telling me. And just look over there—at the corner of the shelf—you will find some figs and nuts. Do you like them?"

"You bet!" said Pinoche.

The interior of the hut smelt of pitch, leather, oil, warm glue, and to these odours was added the sweet woodland aroma of fresh wood-shavings whose silky coils lay on the floor and cracked beneath the feet and, if one picked them up, broke in one's hand, where they left a light resinous dust. The accumulation of sharp, brightly shining tools, wood, scrap-iron, leather straps, nails, bolts, and a thousand other miscellaneous objects made up an admirable collection of odds and ends, to explore which was most exciting. This medley of objects was a very treasure. You found strange things there the use of which you got explained to you, and things which you would have liked for yourself, things you would gladly have stuffed away in your own pocket, such as knives, old scissors, a revolver out of order, odd bits of foot-rules, pegtops, fountain-pens without caps. . . .

Here and there, too, one came across bits of sugar, pieces of gum, dried fruits, an apple, a bar of chocolate. (The sweets were a little dusty, rather sticky, but the boys did not seem to mind that.) One even found occasionally a packet of tobacco of which one stole a tiny pinch. (Father Bricole smoked a pipe at times.)

To sum up, it was a place crammed full of pleasures and delights and of kindness too, a place where one was infinitely happier and better off than in class. Only the idlers knew what joys one tasted there, and they were careful enough not to let the cat out of the bag.

Pinoche, who was often turned out into the corridors, liked going to see Father Bricole. Once more he spent a very pleasant portion of the morning in the little hut.

A few days later a shining motor-car made its way with an air of authority into the principal courtyard of the College. When opposite the main staircase, the chauffeur stopped the car and opened the door for a fat man of vulgar appearance, who seemed to be in a violent temper. This aspect of the newly arrived visitor was of necessity taken very seriously, seeing that the personage in question was stepping out of a magnificent car driven by a man who looked like a sort of admiral engaged for the purpose. The visitor declared that he wished to speak to the Superior without delay. From the tone of voice in which this announcement was made, one could only infer that his conversation with the Abbé Fuche would not be restricted to pleasant generalities. His very evident displeasure inevitably suggested a need for haste. The bell was rung, and as an additional precaution some agile express messengers were despatched to look for the Superior and warn him that M. Pinoche had just arrived and wished to speak to him immediately.

In the meantime M. Saturnin Pinoche had been shown into a special little parlour, where there was a very beautiful Sacred Heart in a glass case on the mantelpiece; and there he was, talking to himself as he paced up and down, for he was in such a state of agitation that he could not keep still. His bad temper will be easily understood. M. Pinoche, father of four sons, Eustache, Hubert, Louis, and Gaston, all of them boarders at the College of

Sainte-Colline, where their education was costing, at the lowest estimate, six thousand francs a year (and you don't find six thousand francs on every gooseberry bush!), had just received, one after another, two worrying letters, the first signed by Father Fuche and the other by his son Hubert.

With many prudent circumlocutions, the Superior wrote that it would be desirable, even in the interests of the child himself, that young Hubert should be removed from Sainte-Colline, where he was not making progress, and be given a more profitable education elsewhere. "In spite of our great experience of youth and the zeal and devotion of our professors, we have now to face the fact that we are all but helpless in face of this strong and independent nature. Hubert has ability, of that there can be no doubt; but his mental outlook, which is already very fixed, is such as to make it imperative that he should be taken firmly in hand by other instructors. I can assure you that we greatly regret having to give you this advice, and that we shall be exceedingly sorry to part with the boy, while his brothers are such satisfactory lads whom we are all happy to have amongst our young people here."

The second letter, posted by a day-boy and drafted in a much more direct style, informed M. Pinoche briefly that the Abbé Menème, master of the fourth form, was a wretched cad and an abominable brute. This ruffian in a cassock had dared to lay hands on one of the Pinoche sons because that little angel had objected to being called a liar, when the real liar was the Abbé Menème himself. All this was extremely displeasing to M. Pinoche, dragging him away from his ordinary occupations; and he was coming now to polish off this business in less than no time, and by the same method as he used for settling everything that did not interest him much, which was to raise his voice and state his conditions which were always the same—"Take it or leave it, my good man."

That his son was a dunce—good heavens, he knew that well enough! He had been one himself. But it had not prevented his becoming a millionaire at the age of fifty. At Hubert's age he was always firmly planted in the streets instead of going to school. Being the son of people of no account, he had been able to do

that, but Hubert, son of a millionaire, could not. Wealth can be a nuisance sometimes. The boy had necessarily to waste a few good years at a smart college. And if he failed to learn anything, he had at least a chance of picking up good manners, and that would be something gained. The only thing that really mattered was that he should be fixed up in the same establishment as his brothers. For M. Pinoche, who was a very busy man, matters were greatly simplified by his having the four boys settled at the same college; he could see them all, and arrange everything for them, in one visit. By this means he saved much time. If the boys were dispersed at different schools, and there was still the daughter to be visited separately, there would be no end to it. Should he go and see Hubert less often because he was an idler? But that idler was on the whole M. Saturnin Pinoche's favourite son, and he used to think: "He'll be a first-class wangler, he'll always fall on his feet, that boy will, with his damned pigheadedness! That's what I predict, and I know what I'm talking about." In the cunning and obstinacy of the son, this far-seeing parent was paying tribute to his own qualities.

M. Pinoche's knowledge of ecclesiastics was somewhat scanty, for he had seen but little of them before his rise in the world. But his knowledge of men in general, whom he had so often fleeced, was pretty thorough, and he thought to himself: "Curés or not, they're all alike. All that's different is their clothes." His cynicism had plenty of justification, for he was a self-made man, one of those whom people on the downward financial path are apt maliciously to speak of as "upstarts."

In the opposite camp every aspect of the case had been no less thoroughly reviewed, and had indeed received even lengthier consideration, for the religious life affords periods of leisure of which advantage may be taken for the purpose of decisions on the wisest policy to adopt in given circumstances. As he made his way to the parlour with the unhurried footsteps and serious, thoughtful air appropriate to the Superior of a large Catholic college, the Abbé Fuche gave a final and comprehensive glance at the situation. There are two things to be considered by a good Superior, who has to be both an administrator of souls and an administrator in the ordinary sense; to mould young lives to

withstand the difficulties and dangers of this world, and to balance the College budget. If one considers the matter more closely, it is really the budget that takes precedence, for the care of souls rests on good finance, since bursarships with deficits to contend with can no longer count on a miracle of Cana to restore the situation. Dogma has to be literally applied, but a balance sheet must be correct to the last centime, and the operations of conscience are more elastic than those of book-keeping; they are better able to stand small adjustments. To remove any inconsistencies between fundamental Christian principles and certain inevitable worldly contingencies was the difficult task which fell specially to the lot of the wise and subtle Abbé Fuche. And he knew that this was so.

He knew it, and in his opinion—as we have already seen—the surest means of exercising strong spiritual influence at the College, and thence, by extension, on that outside world for which the pupils of Sainte-Colline were being prepared, was to make certain of the College having a good income. But income is a matter of reputation, for the world, alas, can never resist the lying trumpets of Fame!

For the maintenance of the College's fine reputation, and consequently of its success in recruiting, it was of the very greatest importance that people should be saying everywhere, throughout the adjacent Departments: "The Pinoche boys are being educated at Sainte-Colline." If it were known that a man like M. Saturnin Pinoche, the most resplendent millionaire in the whole of that part of the country, had selected that College for his boys, there could be no doubt that his choice would set a good example to the other rich families in the district. This, therefore, was the arrangement in the conclusion of which he must contrive somehow to succeed: to get rid of Hubert Pinoche and keep his three brothers. At all costs he must avoid losing all these boys.

With these thoughts in mind, the Abbé Fuche opened the door of the little parlour where the father of the four pupils was awaiting him—of Hubert, the undesirable one; and of Eustache, Louis, and Gaston, tolerable lads—and useful to him.

"Come, come now, Monsieur le Supérieur," M. Saturnin

Pinoche said, bluntly, "it isn't as serious as all that! Why, I myself have cried out 'Croâ!', and 'Down with the curés!' too, when I was Hubert's age. And I did it oftener still, you can take my word for it, and I thought it no end of a joke. And what has been the result? As soon as I got rich I sent my boys to you. And later on Hubert will do as I've done: he will send his sons to the priests. Everybody does it. Really, there's nothing to make a song and dance about! It was simply a bit of mischief."

"No doubt, dear M. Pinoche, no doubt. But cries of this nature are highly injurious, and apt to undermine the normal good behaviour of the College."

"Good behaviour—I like that!" M. Pinoche exclaimed. "For when all's said and done, my son was struck in a brutal manner. Supposing I were to go and shout it from the roof-tops, what then? A little paragraph in the papers, eh?"

"It is a regrettable case, but an entirely exceptional one, dear M. Pinoche. Father Menèmc has been called to account, and if his removal were thought necessary in order to reassure outside opinion . . . well, we never hesitate in these matters. Good manners, correct behaviour, must come before every other consideration."

M. Pinoche decided to settle the matter there and then.

"Listen now, Monsieur le Supérieur, this is my last word. Either you keep all four boys, or you won't have one! You must take your choice. If you give me back one of my sons, I shall take the other three away and send them straight to a secular school. At least they will be able to shout 'Down with the curés!' as much as they want to."

"You would be taking a great moral responsibility, dear Monsieur Pinoche . . ."

"What's that you're saying? Why, it's you yourself who are proposing to take it, Monsieur le Supérieur!"

"Well, if you say that . . . Evidently, it's a case which my own conscience must decide. . . . On the one hand there is the question of discipline, on the other the future, as Christians, of three children, who are innocent. . . . Evidently, the care of souls . . ."

"And what worries me if I take my boys away is this, that the

three sons of Baron de Lamolette, a country neighbour of mine, have become friendly with my boys and would like to be school-fellows of theirs. I have already spoken to the Baron about Sainte-Colline—for next year. He will have to alter all his arrangements, and what shall I look like, then?"

"I see now," said the Abbé Fuche, in a very soothing, conciliatory tone of voice, "that I shall have to consider your own troubles, dear Monsieur Pinoche, and those of Baron de Lamolette as well. . . . These de Lamolettes are connections of the Voinel de Fonfroide, are they not?"

"Yes, that is so," said M. Pinoche.

"Clearly," the Abbé Fuche continued, "it would be a very great satisfaction to bring together seven young people of excellent families at a fine College like ours—as great a satisfaction to the parents as to the teachers."

"It rests with you, Monsieur le Supérieur."

"We shall try and keep Hubert, dear Monsieur Pinoche, since that is so clearly your wish. Besides, the child will mend his ways in due time, of that I have always been quite certain. His heart is in the right place. . . . And now, since you are giving us the great pleasure of coming to see us, you won't wish to go away again without just a glance at our chapel. We are having some notable improvements made there, and for this purpose have let ourselves in for some very heavy expenditure. . . ."

"May I share it?" asked M. Pinoche, as he felt for a pocket inside his coat which contained an all-powerful cheque-book.

The Abbé Fuche seemed very touched, and genuinely surprised.

"My dear sir, really, I don't know whether I ought to accept. . . ."

"Oh, come now, Monsieur le Supérieur," said M. Pinoche, briskly, "it's for God!"

M. Pinoche was already tearing out his cheque. He handed it to the Superior, saying:

"I will see the chapel presently. But will you first have my four young scamps sent along to me here?"

"They shall come at once," the Superior said, as he folded the cheque and stuffed it away in an unfathomable pocket of his.

Just as he was on the point of leaving the room he added:
“Don’t be too hard on our little Hubert. He is a good child in spite of everything—a very good child. And how could he not be a good child, with so good a father?”

M. Pinoche’s visit was soon known to the whole College. The first time that the Abbé Menème met Pinoche’s gaze, in class, he saw in the boy’s eyes a gleam of merriment that was nothing short of an insult. He took the only course open to him for dealing with the young good-for-nothing; a feeble expedient, but he had no choice in the matter.

“As for you, Pinoche,” he said with contempt, “you may do anything you like provided you make no noise. So far as I am concerned, you no longer count.”

Pinoche met the abbé’s contempt with a gentle, patronizing smile. He said to those nearest him, loudly enough for the master to hear:

“I’ve had him on toast!”

The Abbé Menème felt the insult most bitterly. He flushed deeply. But he was able to retain his self-control, knowing that his was in any event a lost cause. He had come up against the millions of M, Saturnin Pinoche, and those millions made a barrier of gold which, with all the good will in the world, he could never surmount. He turned away from a Pinoche who was invincible, and wallowing in the delights of idleness and sloth.

From that time onwards, the dunce found life at the College far from unpleasant. Seeing that nobody expected anything of him, he left everyone else in peace—a proof that to be left in peace himself had been his only object. He went about everywhere, into holes and corners where none of the other pupils ever set foot, and at hours when they themselves were detained. The Fathers left him free. All they did, as they saw him pass was simply to remark:

“Ah, that’s Pinoche! It’s poor Pinoche, just taking a little walk!”

One day, when he was bored, Pinoche read his history book. He found it rather entertaining and read it several times from

beginning to end. Then he pilfered some more elaborate works from the elder boys; and he ended by knowing more history than anyone else at the College. But he took good care to say nothing about this: he was very comfortably situated and did not want to queer his own pitch. He soon acquired a conviction that the head of the form was a complete ass who didn't know a word of history (he could spout it, but had no idea what it all meant). And he considered, too, that the Abbé Menème did not know much more. He also made a number of very interesting notes and comments, but kept every word of these to himself. As he was now no longer constantly disturbed by the master, he had plenty of time for observation, and for reaping a rich harvest of things which would be useful to him later on. He led a very pleasant life; but he never stopped playing the fool.

During the first few days of July, Father Fuche sent for the Abbé Menème. He wished to speak to him in confidence. He asked him:

"Tell me, Father—I suppose young Hubert Pinoche will not be getting any prize?"

"No, indeed, he will not!"

"Not even an *accessit*?"

"Good heavens, in what subject could he have one? For months past I have ceased asking him questions and getting any exercises from him."

"Nevertheless, we have got to find something for him, so that his name may be mentioned once."

"Father, it's impossible, absolutely impossible. It would be contrary to all justice."

The Abbé Fuche then assumed a cold and distant manner, the manner of a Superior who knows what he is talking about and is making a decision whose motives are not intended for criticism by any master of the fourth form.

"Now, don't be childish, Father! Justice is not of this world, you know that, don't you? To aspire to its establishment here on earth would be to show a culpable and useless pride. You can't think of any subject in which young Pinoche is less ignorant?"

"No, frankly, I can't. He is ignorant about everything, and radically so. Now if there were a prize for ignorance . . ."

"What about geography?"

"He could not name the continents."

"History?"

"He mixes up Attila and Vasco da Gama, the geese on the Capitol and Hannibal's elephants, and thinks that Marignan was one of Napoleon's victories."

"Mathematics?"

"Zero multiplied by zero."

"Greek?"

"He can't say the alphabet."

"Latin?"

"*Quousque tandem*, Pinoche, *abutere patientia nostra*. I have had to give it up."

"There's the silly duffers' prize—gymnastics."

"He refuses to do it with the others."

"Well, Father, anyhow, do just think a little. I *must* get him a mention. Only one, but I must have it. I am anxious to give M. Pinoche this pleasure; he is one of the subscribers to our chapel and knows Baron de Lamolette intimately. I am bent on doing this. Be kind and help me."

"Oh well, oh well," the Abbé Menèmc said, with the utmost despondency, "if it is really absolutely necessary . . . Pinoche might be given an *accessit* in religious instruction. I seem to remember his saying something once about St Joseph, something which was very nearly sensible—I've forgotten exactly what it was."

The reputation and the privileges which Pinoche acquired during the school year 1911-12 he intended to retain throughout the year 1912-13. He remained, naturally, in the same form, the fourth. He took a perverse pleasure in doing this, knowing how hateful his presence was to the Abbé Menèmc. Pinoche detested the abbé, who had once laid hands on him, and had sworn to make him pay dearly for this offence. The most effective means that he had devised for poisoning the abbé's life was never to leave him, never to miss one of his lessons, during which he sat

in silent irony, gazing at the master with a look which spoke volumes. This look made the Abbé Menème feel exceedingly uncomfortable, to such an extent that he sometimes stammered with fury, while his cheeks and ears became suffused with blood. On these occasions, forgetting his cassock, his soul, and his eternal salvation, the abbé would willingly have strangled Pinoche. His conscience certainly bore the burden of blood-thirsty intentions, and Pinoche felt this. It gave him deep joy, and this enjoyment was written large on every feature.

If the truth were told, this mutual hatred between the man and the boy had been in existence ever since they first came in contact with each other: there was a germ of it in the mutual antagonism of their two natures. But from now onwards it was Pinoche who held the upper hand. He had every intention of remaining in that happy position.

It would be readily supposed that a boy like Pinoche could not fail to be in a state of war with the Abbé Jubil. Nevertheless, the relations between them were much less strained than might be imagined. This master's actual pet aversions were Lamandin, Nusillon, Lhumilié, Quaque, and a few others. He was much less suspicious of Pinoche, who had more concentration and was less excitable; who always got his own way, but knew how to arrange his entertainment without making a disturbance.

The secret meetings in the playground were resumed, in the corner by the privies, with Pinoche as arbitrator. He gave his young companions guidance and advice, without letting himself be too much involved in their schemes, unless something quite out of the ordinary were in contemplation. As a general rule he avoided endangering his prestige by embarking on adventures whose success was in doubt. His job was rather to supply ideas, and say who would be the best to carry them out.

These secret meetings, which were aimed principally at the Abbé Menème and the Abbé Jubil, aroused keen competition, which was destined to have fruitful results. Instances of these will be given later.

CHAP. V: WAR ON THE ABBÉ JUBIL

THERE is a possibility that a certain lack of understanding on the reader's part might lead him to criticize the present writer on the score of his exclusion from the narrative of any edifying, exemplary, or even merely satisfactory character, and his omission of any account of the good pupils, the well-behaved boys at Sainte-Colline, those whose scholastic achievements were a source of pleasure for masters and parents alike.

The narrator might also be charged with a failure to lay sufficient stress on those innate propensities of a good and proper kind which could not fail to be found in certain pupils; for no one denies that boys—like the men which they will become later on—may be divided in the first instance into two very distinct categories, the good and the bad, which categories themselves contain various subdivisions; the workers and the idlers, the steady and the unreliable, the dreamers and those who bestir themselves, the reckless and the cowardly, to name only the principal ones.

It is easy to see what might prompt the reader to make these criticisms. It is simply the fact that grown-up people, till they reach an advanced age and sometimes till they die, never entirely cease to be children, to believe in the boggy-man, the wicked wolf of the woods, ravaging beasts of the night, and a thousand and one incarnations of terror scattered here, there, and everywhere which urge men not to wander too far from the straight and narrow path.

It is usual for people to wish that life may be like a well-ordered novel, whose happy ending gives reassurance and encouragement, showing as it does that the righteous end by obtaining their reward; and there are but few people who would agree that they did not deserve to be classed among the just and righteous of this world. It needs either great strength of character, exceptional humility, or blank despair, to enable a man to say to himself, when face to face with the accusations of his own conscience, "I'm a pretty thoroughgoing rascal." (An exception

must be made in the case of those perverted individuals whose ostentatious misdeeds are their only source of pride; who glory in their sins. But it can hardly be supposed that these wretched people ever pause a moment to examine their own consciences.)

The present writer's reply to all the foregoing is this, that he had already considered how far these objections would be valid, and had come to the conclusion that, so far as this narrative is concerned, they were negligible, or at least inopportune; and he feels that the time has now arrived for a clear and final explanation of his point of view.

The standards of good behaviour which have been laid down by grown-up people for children, who are so completely subject to them and in the main so like them, not only as they were formerly but as they are now, are not a little cruel in their prohibitions, these young people being forbidden to squabble, to be lazy, to dream, to pilfer, to fight, to dissemble, to cheat, to use cunning, to disobey, to slander, to invent, to make experiments. . . . These precautions are doubtless admirable and worthy to be praised: nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that if grown men themselves carried out the precepts which they have devised for children's use, they would be at a loss to know what to do with their lives. It should further be remembered that precepts are one thing and Nature another. Should it be a cause for astonishment when Nature (that is, our instincts, which in children are still in the raw) proves stronger than some quite arbitrary ideal, which no one observes strictly nor has ever done so, and never entirely of his own free will, except in some rare and exceptional cases of very special predisposition. (We are told, for example, that the saintly *curé* of Ars, at the age of eight or ten, preferred his rosary to playing marbles or spinning peg-tops with his young companions—which must have been a little disquieting, however admirable it was.)

We must here draw the reader's attention to an old and widespread instance of self-delusion, which explains much that seems absurd. Forgetting to cast even a glance at their past family history, failing to remember what sort of people they really are, and omitting to ask themselves what, if any, personal merits they possess to make them superior to the rest of their own

lineage, all parents, more or less, are wildly anxious that their children shall turn out to be little nine days' wonders, with the makings of saints or great men. Extending their own personal vanity to include their offspring, they want these children to be astonishing, as lovely as the day, models of goodness, and worthy to be admired in every respect. The result of all this is that they often end by expecting more from their children, in spite of a lamentable family past, than would be demanded from grown-up people themselves.

As regards genius, which many human beings proudly aspire to find in their progeny, rare indeed are those parents who are capable of discerning its first-fruits. The reason for this is that, having neither knowledge nor experience of this matter, they are ignorant of the fact that of all things in this world, genius is the most restless, the most fault-finding, the most tyrannical, the least manageable, and that its aspirations have to battle in the first instance with every established custom and settled routine. In its first obscure manifestations, genius gives an impression of disorder and incoherence. Now parents demand nice restful geniuses, Michael Angelos, Shakespeares, and Balzacs, thoroughly ripe, and ready for exploitation, the receipt of honours, and bringing in money. But if by chance a child is born to them who is full of mystery, and seething with some inner force that is striving to express itself, in nine cases out of ten they take him for a good-for-nothing or a scoundrel. They would accept the paternity of a Napoleon who had already won the campaign of Italy, but would repudiate the young scapegrace of the military academy at Brienne.

These considerations explain many misunderstandings between parents and children. The child is separated from the world by an abyss, the abyss of his uncertainties, his ignorance, and his doubt. It is the reasonable duty of those on whom his fate depends to span this abyss with a bridge upon which he may venture with confidence. What they usually do is the exact opposite. Far from guiding and encouraging the child, they frequently expect everything of him, as though his life were nothing but the fulfilment of duties, as though he were in some way or other himself responsible for being delicate, or faltering, or wild,

and for not hastening to display the gifts which those around him have decided that he possesses. These latter refuse to recognize the truth: which is, that the child bears his own destiny within himself, that he has not chosen it, and that even his own qualities may perhaps cause him suffering; for childhood's capacity for suffering is great.

It is not to be denied that there were at Sainte-Colline, in 1912-13, numbers of well-behaved boys, if by that one means pupils who show that submissiveness, that general readiness to obey, which is designated as "good behaviour" in educational establishments. There was certainly the usual quota of these, but it was only relative and constantly changing, for good behaviour in children affords no grounds whatever for prediction of their future. But this expression "good behaviour," taken in the sense in which it was used at the school, was certainly applicable to several series of pupils worthy of commendation either for close attention to their work, the dull regularity of their conduct, or excellent demonstrations of piety, with a certain rather obsequious way of seeking the favour of their masters. Among these we may mention Jules Prunot, Alphonse Bigotin, Pifre, Labé-nisson, Fraisse, Durand, Dupont, Dubois, Duchamp, Ragotin, Biglard, Tatillot, Hueppe, Bidon, Froutte, Bedouillet, Vachette, and Sautanon, Lardanchois, Mouillave, etc. In the same way one would find nothing to say regarding certain masters whose unremarkable personalities afforded no occasions for stories or gossip. These priests, as also the commendable pupils, together with those of whom there is nothing special to record—all those, in fact, who were inconspicuous in every way—made up the floating mass of the population of the College, and rendered it amenable to government. They acknowledged the paramount authority of the system with its rules and regulations, and did nothing to evade it. They constituted the major portion of the little community.

But good pupils, like happy nations, have no history. This being so, the narrator would have undertaken a fruitless and impossible task had he set out to compile an edifying (and in all likelihood artificial) account of the scholastic year 1912-13 at the

College of Sainte-Colline. He remembered that the history of their own passions never fails to be a source, indeed the principal source, of interest to mankind. He felt that the passions of childhood are no less ardent than those of maturity, of which indeed they are the germ. He suggests—and asks the reader to ponder it well—that instincts which are praiseworthy and full of promise (everything depends, of course, on the use to which they will be put in later life), such as curiosity, boldness, the critical spirit, ingenuity, imagination, and strength of character, could find no outlet within the framework of the College rules, which provided no field of action for them. He draws the reader's attention to the fact that every young human being in process of development is a mystery—a mystery both to himself and to everyone else. The study of such a mystery might well be the most absorbing thing in the world, were it not that the numbers of pupils prevent the masters from giving close individual attention to each boy, and that the exceptional faculties of discernment and intuition which this task demands are withheld from many teachers, who, making due allowance for the difference in age and experience, are often inferior in talent and resource to the children entrusted to their care.

There is a multitude of reasons why childhood is a difficult period, a perilous labyrinth from which many young people of tender age who have become lost therein must discover the exits unaided. The guidance afforded them by Nature and by social convention is often unsuitable for steering them across this maze, the design of which varies from one generation to another.

And so it comes about that, apart from the easier conditions which some specially favoured children enjoy, every little youngster who appears in this world has to cut his way through the surrounding darkness, to struggle in it blindly, buying each new experience at a cost of pain, until the age when he is free from supervision and begins to come into his own. And even then his setbacks and disappointments will not be finished!

It will now be understood why the present writer, having to speak of childhood and its surroundings, has made a special choice, by way of illustration, of certain turbulent heroes. These may be regarded as dolts, young ruffians, bad lots in embryo.

Nevertheless, so far as they are concerned, the adventure of life has not yet been encountered. What they are as schoolboys gives no hint of what they will be as grown men. Their parents may be wrong in lamenting over them, as other parents, who think that the children they have begotten are pearls of great price, are mistaken in their rejoicing. Surprises will occur, and often ten, twenty, or thirty years later some of the laggards in the race may well have proved victors.

In any case it appears to us to be certain that the exploits of the *Malgaches*, of Pinoche, Lamandin, Nusillon, Quaque, Lhumilié, Lardier, Galuchon, Garfouillat, and other young scamps of whom we are writing, are a striking illustration of those severe, those deep, those pathetic mental struggles of childhood which people pretend to regard as comparatively unimportant, while on the contrary their importance is fundamental, because it is felt for the whole of life, because it has given to many people an angle of incidence, whether they are acting in accordance with the principles of the education they have received, or whether, having had to struggle against those principles, they have undertaken a search of their own hearts and, leaving all beaten tracks and well-worn paths, have discovered and brought into the light of day their souls' treasure, the finest qualities they possess.

In a study such as we are writing, the dunces and the insubordinate should not be overlooked. Those who have been misfits at school will not necessarily be failures in later life.

Let us now return to our story.

Of the thirty priests at Sainte-Colline, the greater number were accustomed to say their Mass every morning before seven o'clock. The College had therefore to furnish daily a corresponding number of servers, whom the Fathers came themselves to ask for at the doors of the classrooms. The master in charge would then make a selection from those boys who held up their hands. There was no lack of volunteers, especially among the whimsical and the inattentive boys, who made a great show of their need of a little extra sanctification. It would unfortunately seem probable that it was not so much this particular need which prompted them to hold up their hands as a wild desire to

cut short that confounded interminable morning lesson which lasted from 5.30 to 7.15, without breakfast of any kind. The Mass provided an excellent opportunity for stretching one's legs a little and, in the absence of anything better, it was a diversion.

In the chapel, the apse included five small altars arranged in a semicircle behind the high altar. At these secondary altars the Fathers officiated on weekdays in turn, each on his own account. With the assistance of a well-trained server, they got through their Mass in twenty or twenty-five minutes. The priest then went back to the vestry, and the server went off to return to the classroom, but loitered a little on the way, either making an attempt to pinch something at the refectory, or else going past the privies by the playground, where one could get a few whiffs of a cigarette, and so acquire a faint smell of tobacco, which would mildly impress one's pals. The Fathers' Mass, however you looked at it, meant a very pleasant little escape.

But there was more to it than that. . . . At schools, great waves of mischievous and unruly behaviour are apt to spring into being periodically. For some little time previously, indulgence in strong drink had become the fashion among boys of the Middle Division. This indulgence, it should be clearly understood, was on a very moderate scale, being more a question of "showing off" than of any settled vice. But it was a point of honour among a small circle of young scapegraces that they should make a practice of tasting, with all the airs of real connoisseurs, rum and brandy and other alcoholic drinks, all this being made possible by the secret aid of certain day-boys who smuggled in flasks of these forbidden goods. (One suspects that these day-boys, who usually had a good business instinct, made by this means some small profits which they squandered on pleasures that their parents knew nothing about.) In any case, the gay young sparks who could gladden their companions' noses with a whiff of breath worthy of an old sea-dog or a coal-heaver were entitled to an esteem which anyone might envy.

As we have already remarked, it was a matter of fashion, and was not destined to last long, but at that time it was in full swing. The supreme distinction would have been to get as drunk as an English lord or a romantic poet. Musset, that child of a bygone

century, had a great reputation on that account, and in those boys' minds he shed on drunkenness a lustre of sound quality. They associated this form of debauchery with a life quite out of the ordinary, into which inspiration, fantasy, and amorous adventure were constantly entering. But in their impatience they put the cart before the horse, and conceived of alcoholism as preceding the works of genius. And being at an age when one has no misgivings of any kind, the prospect of shouldering the responsibilities of genius held no fears for them. They felt ready for anything, and banishing all thoughts of examinations to come, dreamed of a future manhood which would be a period of stirring, astounding success!

And thus it was that, long before the cocktail period, a small sect was formed at Sainte-Colline whose object it was to win fame by exploits which the tender age of the adepts did in fact render surprising. Unfortunately—or fortunately—lack of sufficient pocket-money prevented the boys from enjoying on any large scale experiences which were very expensive. On the other hand, drink was in short supply at the College, where a wholesome frugality ranked high among the preoccupations of the teaching staff (who were strongly encouraged by the Bursar, the clever Abbé Ragraton, who had calculated to a centime the average cost price of a pupil). Rice, lentils, peas, haricot beans, and macaroni, served in generous platefuls, were adequately, but by no means temptingly, prepared. Hunger could be satisfied by this food, but no real pleasure obtained from it, and its principal seasoning was furnished by Nature, in the appetite of the boys themselves; who were thus usefully initiated into the hardships of the rough and ready cooking of military service, of cheap eating-houses, and even of popular soup-kitchens, to such an extent that a boy who had been through the mill at Sainte-Colline need never thereafter stand in fear of life's setbacks and disasters, which start with distressing culinary incompetence as their basis and foundation.

As regards the wine served in the refectories, this was in reality a dilution which renewed the miracle of the multiplication of the wineskins, but renewed it with a proportion of water to wine which would have secured lifelong imprisonment for any wine

merchant. If as much water had been sprinkled on foreheads as flowed into the bottles of wine, the pagans of the five continents might very soon have found themselves amply baptized. But this Jordan, alas! streamed down throats only, in a misleading pink disguise which, so far as taste was concerned, was hardly as good as those inferior, thin, disagreeable wines produced by the ill-favoured countries of this world, those countries whose stunted vines and grapes with thin, paltry juice bring no real joy to the heart of man, no gladness nor warmth of good companionship. The mixture impudently concocted by the Abbé Ragraton would have been suitable at best for bearing up the ark, but could never have sustained the courage of Noah, its valiant navigator. (Any more, one may add, than it would have sustained the eloquence and the commercial cunning of the Abbé Ragraton himself had he used it. But he was better placed than anyone else for knowing what his wine was worth. He carefully abstained from touching it, and was content to drink between meals only.)

There was only one pure unadulterated wine at the College, a wine worthy of the name, and it was that which the Abbé Ragraton drank himself on an empty stomach; the altar wine, an excellent wine of certified origin. This was not forgotten by the members of the drinking sect, who were known amongst themselves as the Jolly Tipplers. They rapidly became very zealous servers, for a reason which will be disclosed, a reason far from orthodox, except from the winegrower's point of view.

When saying their Mass the Fathers, with rare exceptions, did not consume the entire contents of the flagons, and there was, moreover, behind the high altar a cupboard in which a store of the famous early morning wine was kept. The servers went there to get the supplies of water and wine needed for the sacrament. It was in a very inconspicuous position, and the door of the cupboard was placed in such a way that the boys were partly hidden by it. It was there that the Jolly Tipplers went to tip off what was left in the flagons. This silly trick demanded considerable fortitude on their part, for white wine at six o'clock in the morning gave them a severe griping pain in the stomach. But honour was at stake, for each boy, as he served a Mass close

at hand, kept an eye on his companions. It would have been too silly to say "Jolly Tippler" to each other without tippling at all, though people who couldn't play the game would certainly have done so!

It was not long before personal pride took a hand in the matter, and incited them to the issue of stupid challenges and the commission of wild and foolish acts. It became no longer a question of being just an ordinary Jolly Tippler, but rather of earning a right to be considered a remarkable one. Bets were made. There must be a competition for the drinking of the greatest quantity of white wine, each competitor being, of course, under the supervision of the other entrants.

A great solemn challenge, which had been keenly encouraged by Pinoche, Lamandin, and Quaque, who expected it to bring them entertainment of no ordinary kind, set Ravrot and Bajon at grips with each other behind the cupboard door. These two boys had been showing off rather too much for some time past. A test imposed to the utmost limit would show what each was worth, and enable one to see if they were really of the stuff that super-tipplers are made of. The affair took place in the presence of Pinoche, while Lamandin and Quaque, cleverly posted, mounted guard. Ravrot and Bajon each took a flagon, raised it to his lips, and at a given signal got under way. Pinoche spurred them on ruthlessly, giving them no time either to think or even to take breath.

"Ravrot's winning!"

Bajon immediately redoubled his efforts. The wine was trickling over his chin and down his neck. Pinoche announced in an undertone:

"Bajon's going ahead!"

Then it was Ravrot's turn to choke. The result of the contest remained in doubt until the end; and in any case Pinoche was completely indifferent as to whether there were a winner or no. All he wanted was to see the effect on two raw and inexperienced drinkers of a large quantity of white wine absorbed at high speed. He expected it to be rather amusing. . . .

Ravrot and Bajon had to give it up before their drinks were finished. They were at the end of their tether. They felt as

though vitriol were flowing down inside their chests. Flashes of red light were dancing before their eyes. Each boy had drunk the greater part of a pint of wine. Suddenly, when the cold air caught them as they were leaving the chapel, they found that they were drunk.

They were drunk as one can only be at one's first experience of drunkenness, when one knows nothing of the brutal effects of alcohol. They were drunk in a way which was to some extent a caricature, and yet seemed a truer representation of drunkenness than is ordinarily seen. It looked almost as though it were a deliberate case of acting as, arm in arm and with mutual congratulations, they zigzagged along the corridors, followed at some distance by Pinoche, Lamandin, and Quaque, who were laughing long and loudly, for the entertainment was surpassing their fondest hopes.

In this surprising condition Ravrot and Bajon made their entry into the classroom, without any lessening of a cheerful optimism which completely ignored all rules and regulations, and even the peril embodied in the dark and menacing figure of the Abbé Jubil, whom they appeared to take for a merry old boon companion of theirs, one whose friendliness was inexhaustible. Knocking against walls and desks, pulling the hair of their fellow pupils as they passed and throwing their books on to the floor, they giggled with the blissful happiness of congenital idiots, as little troubled by the general bewilderment as if it had been encouragement instead.

In his raised chair, the master in charge, speechless with surprise, was watching, without the least conception of what it implied, the strange behaviour of the two wild, unbridled boys. At this attention on his part, Ravrot suddenly took offence. Quite spontaneously he uttered the words of the hardened drinker:

"Look here, now," he said loudly, "I'm not tight!"

For the Abbé Jubil these words came as a flash of enlightenment. And what followed a moment later proved to him that his suspicion was justified. Bajon had barely reached his seat when he was seized with alarming hiccups, and was sick. Ravrot, no less overcome but more cheerful, broke out into a

flood of gushing endearments, irresistibly impelled by those feelings of universal love and affection which make some inebriates so embarrassing. He gazed at the Abbé Jubil with a tranquil, carefree smile, a gentle, trusting smile, and at regular intervals he cried out: "Oh, but isn't he a handsome fellow! Oh, but isn't he a scream!" Nothing could possibly have been funnier. And a few moments later the merriment it caused rose to the point of frenzy, when the Abbé Jubil began an attempt to drag to the door a Ravrot stubbornly determined to love and cherish him, but no less firmly resolved not to leave the classroom; and who kept crying aloud in accents of reproach: "Oh, the nasty, spiteful man! Oh, the dirty dog!"

The winding-up of this affair took place in the presence of the Abbé Ragraton. This was because, apart from the mischievous and wicked behaviour itself, there was the question of damages to pay. Enquiries had established the fact that the consumption of altar wine had noticeably increased for a month past; and this caused a variation in the Bursar's estimate of costs. He asked for the two culprits to be handed over to him. Reimbursement seemed to him to be the most moral and the most salutary form of punishment. Moreover, his wine had been tampered with—his wine chosen with such loving care! Anything which affected that was a serious matter.

"There you are, you dirty young rascals!" he cried out as the two boys stood before him. "Do you know what I am going to do? I'm going to put each of you down for twenty francs extra, and your parents will have to pay. What do you say to that, eh?"

They had no comment to make. The Abbé Ragraton, who was far from hard-hearted, asked them:

"So you like white wine, do you?"

They answered truthfully, thinking that the truth in this case could only serve their cause.

"Oh no, Father!"

But the truth was their undoing.

"They don't like it," the Abbé Ragraton exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "they haven't even the excuse of liking it! They don't like that wine—my white wine. Very well, then, you

little devils! Listen now, twenty-five francs is what's going down in your bills, you dirty young rascals! And now clear out, both of you and go and drink water, you poor little idiots! Dunces, the pair of you! Dunces in drink!"

The position which they occupied in the classroom played an important part in the life of the boys at the College. The places at the back, those farthest away from the master on duty, were considered the best. It was a privilege of the senior boys to occupy them. As the boys became promoted according to their seniority, so did they move farther away from the master's chair, until they reached the back rows of benches, and could amuse themselves in different ways without fear of disturbance.

This privilege, however, was withheld from boys given to ragging, whose pranks and mischief necessitated a constant supervision. This had just happened to Lamandin, who was quite incapable of keeping quiet, and was now foaming with rage, and thus exposed to the resentment of the Abbé Jubil at very close quarters. His debit account, which was constantly increasing in the abbé's famous notebook, would soon make his situation an impossible one. It was all very well for him to brave it out, and declare: "I don't care a hang," but Lamandin was really suffering with each fresh punishment, when the time came round for him to begin his sentry-go at the foot of a tree, or to start an interminable series of tramps round the playground, or to go and copy pages of selected passages in an empty classroom, or to stay put in a corner of the dormitory, in the evening. One may throw one's weight about to any extent, but it's the master who wins every time, in this little game of usury.

On that particular day Lamandin had not had one single quarter of an hour to himself for relaxation. He was revolving in his mind, as he sat there in class, the fact that to-morrow things would be exactly the same, the same the day after, and similarly for perhaps weeks to come; for the more he was deprived of recreation, the more he sought compensations elsewhere, and the more punishments fell to his lot. There was no reason why this should ever stop, especially now that he had set the master at defiance and the latter had given him a warning: "I've got my

eye on you, Lamandin!" And coming as it did from that swine Flabbyfoot, you knew what *that* meant. . . .

Lamandin was pondering over this dismal future which lay before him, and boiling with rage and fury. He turned his eyes towards his enemy and kept them there in a steady gaze which was filled with hatred and a desire for vengeance. And with a rapid movement of the lips as though he were repeating a well learned lesson, he murmured: "Skunk! You wretched skunk! With that repulsive mug of yours, enough to give the angels fits! Well, you lout of a priest! Lout of a priest, lout of a priest, lout of a . . ." That gave him a little relief, but it was not enough, a revenge so entirely detached as this. To revile him *sotto voce* was no way to score a triumph over that despicable Old Slipper. He tried to think of something quite new, something formidable. . . . And at the same time, he repeated over and over again his "lout of a priest," in the rhythm of a litany in which the uttering of each response brought another day's indulgence.

Two years previously, in the dormitory of the Junior Division there had been some curious and disturbing incidents. A boy of eleven used to get up silently and wander about in his night-shirt in the corridors, which at those hours were dark and deserted. It was even said that this boy, miraculously preserved from danger, was accustomed to prowl about the roofs, close to the edge. It was a case of somnambulism.

It is probable that the young sleepwalker was credited with more abnormalities than his crises had justified. That, however, did not matter much. The consideration which stood out from all others, and impressed people strongly, was this, that Nature, in her disturbances and her anomalies, justifies certain states of unconscious and involuntary action. Here was an idea which should be thoroughly examined, a few clever people thought. They did so, then set it aside, as it did not offer any immediate opportunities for investigation.

It was this idea which had just reappeared in the mind of Lamandin, and he was now dreaming over it with intense pleasure, sucking the while at a bar of chocolate cream from end to end, which grew thinner and thinner as he moved it slowly

and deliciously up and down, using his handkerchief as a barrier against prying eyes. Little by little a scheme was taking shape. Objections and difficulties were not insurmountable. It would be an outbreak of an exceptional kind, so designed as to involve four or five boys at most, who would have to be trustworthy and well able to keep a secret. Pinoche, of course . . . Everything pointed to Quaque and Lhumilié for parts for which Lamandin was already casting them. . . . He was rehearsing everything in his own mind, down to the slightest details, with the idea of telling the others about his proposal next day, in the corner by the privies, close to the playground. . . .

The choice of Quaque and Lhumilié was certainly a happy one. They were exactly the kind of boys required. The former, phlegmatic and with a deep caustic humour, had a well-deserved reputation for being the most accomplished actor in the College. It was impossible to make him laugh, blush, or turn pale against his will, while he could grow pale, blush, have hiccoughs, sneeze, and vomit as and when he wished to do so. And in the simulation of bewilderment and astonishment he was considered unrivalled. The other boy, Lhumilié, could be started off on any kind of adventure whatsoever with the certainty that he would put his heart and soul into it and carry out his instructions to the letter. He was a past-master in the arts of bawling and of panicking, a champion exponent of hysterical laughter, sobbing, and contortions; in a word, a boy supremely well qualified for spreading disorder where it was disorder that was required.

The aim and object of Lamandin was to rob the Abbé Jubil of his famous notebook with its record of punishments and its detailed notes, that notebook which never left him—indeed, one could only suppose that he must take it to bed with him! That he must take it to bed with him—that was the line of thought on which Lamandin had worked, and had come to this conclusion: that during the night the abbé must slip the notebook under his bolster, or place it, with his breviary, on his night table. It would have to be sought for in one of these two places, and in order to get there the Abbé Jubil would have to be ousted from his lair. (The two masters on duty in the Division occupied two small

enclosures, one at each end of the dormitory, made of curtains fixed on rods. All they had to do, for the purpose of supervision, was to draw these curtains, by which they were hidden, a little way apart.)

This was Lamandin's plan. A sleepwalker, Quaque, would frighten a sleeper, Lhumilié, out of his wits; he would wake with a start and shout for help as loudly as he could. This noise would be taken up by two or three boys playing minor parts. Continuing on his way, the somnambulist would jostle a few more sleepers and go out of the dormitory leaving the door wide open. Lhumilié would then cry out that there was a ghost, and rush to light up one of two gas jets turned down low, which, however, he would extinguish altogether. All this would make a fine hurly-burly, which would inevitably draw the two masters out of their respective enclosures; one of them would certainly dash away in search of Quaque, the somnambulist, while the other would be striving to restore order. Lamandin would take advantage of this confusion, dart into the abbé's little retreat, and lay hold of the notebook. Anything that might happen after that—save a few possible punishments—would be without interest. Quaque would escape with nothing worse than having to be as white as a sheet next day, with several days in the infirmary, where he would be able to slack about and do nothing. Lhumilié might perhaps catch it a bit, but not much, for everyone would be out to help him. The capture of the notebook having been achieved, these little annoyances would be too trifling for them to notice.

In this form the whole scheme was explained to Pinoche in the presence of Quaque and Lhumilié, the two boys principally involved. Pinoche acted as technical adviser in the details of the hoax, and nothing important was to be undertaken without his preliminary approval. This remarkable leader provided for every possible contingency. He approved the scheme, but drew attention to a few points which had been insufficiently studied.

"There must be six people in it," he said. "We could take Gustier and Barnigoul with us."

They were boys in the second string, but excellent helpers,

and loyal; boys who would give active co-operation in any rag. They were thoroughly reliable.

"Why do we want two more?" Lamandin asked.

"To chuck Froutte and Bedouillet out of bed. They're a couple of sneaks. They mustn't see you going into Flabbyfoot's den. And what about the notebook? What are you going to do with it?"

"Hide it, of course!"

"And where, if you please? Flabbyfoot, to mention no one else, is about the last word in dirty swine. You can bet your life there'll be a hunt round for it."

"Well, then, what do we do with it?"

"Chuck it in the privies—at once!" Pinoche said, firmly. "Directly you've pinched it, just you let me have it, and I'll go and pitch it away before the morning."

These arrangements having been agreed upon, minutely detailed preparations were put in hand for the great plan, the carrying out of which was fixed for two days later, and took place punctually at the appointed hour. It was a fine riotous nocturnal scene that was let loose, and deliciously funny for those who were in the secret. The performances of Quaque and Lhumilié were beyond praise. The former, an imperturbable figure, was an excellent somnambulist, and when the Abbé Jubil, brutal as ever, shook him by the arm in order to arouse him from his trance-like condition, he had a most perfect fit of hysteria, bordering on epilepsy, which tailed off into an attack of weeping and ended with a relapse into a state of torpor which deprived him of the power of speech. As for Lhumilié, there were no half-measures about his shrieks and yells, which had in them a genuine note of terror; and this yelling, which was barely human, aroused the whole dormitory. When it came to explanations, his half-insane appearance and feverish, agitated utterance greatly complicated the task of the two masters, who were completely mystified and did not know what to do. Under cover of this confusion, Lamandin secured the notebook and passed it on without difficulty to Pinoche, who immediately got rid of it for good and all; while two or three boys, pitched on to the floor as the result of careful attentions bestowed on them by Gustier and

Barnigoul, were busy extricating themselves, with sighs and groans, from a confused entanglement of bedclothes. It was indeed a splendid feat of arms, and its complete success did great honour to those who had conceived and planned it.

At eleven o'clock, with its peace and calm at last restored, the dormitory returned to its slumbers. But six gay young rascals awaited the morrow with impatience. They were looking forward to some real joy, that intense joy which is suppressed and hidden from others, and which at the College took on a false appearance of affliction, or of indignation. After an outbreak like that, there couldn't help being the very devil of a row!

When they rose the following morning, the Division saw plainly, by the cold fury which his expression betrayed, by the gleam of spite and hatred in his hard little eyes, by his tone of voice even harsher and more grating than usual, that the Abbé Jubil was turning over various suspicions in his mind and devising appropriate reprisals. In such circumstances as these the boys were accustomed, as a measure of safety, to show meekness and submission. But those who knew all that lay beneath the surface did this with feelings of delight. For Pinoche and the others the master's suppressed fury was a genuine feast. Taking care not to stand in a group lest they should attract attention, they made little signs to each other which implied: "Things are beginning to hum!"; they were transfigured by happiness, and this happiness gave them the appearance of good pupils, filled with zeal and pious feeling.

As he was leaving the dormitory the Abbé Jubil called out the names of ten pupils, including Lamandin, Quaque, Lhumilié, Gustier, and Barnigoul. His only omission was Pinoche, whom he believed to be firmly rooted in his splendid isolation—and a hopeless fool.

"Stay with me," he said.

He left the Division in charge of the second master. As soon as he was alone with the supposed culprits ("But what have we done?" the boys seemed to be asking), he gave them an order:

"Empty your pockets."

When this was finished, he examined the linings. His next step was to make the boys take off their jumpers and their

trousers. He did not utter a word, and no one dared ask him a question. The search gave no result.

"Dress yourselves again," the Abbé Jubil said. "And go down to the classroom. And no talking!"

He remained alone in the dormitory in order, so thought the heroes of the previous night, to continue his search. And search he might! But it was Pinoche who had shown such foresight: if the notebook had not been engulfed for ever in the place to which he had consigned it, the culprits might well have been caught when they awoke. . . .

An hour later the Abbé Jubil appeared in the classroom. There was much curiosity as to what would happen. But nothing happened. Ah, he knew devilish well how to look after himself, did that cute and crafty schoolmaster who was such an old hand at the game! They had dished him, it was true, but he wasn't going to shout it from the housetops. He was swallowing his rage and making opportunities for revenge. Still, it did seem quite certain that at any moment now the Division would be getting it in the neck. . . .

So far as the boys were concerned, it was a magnificent victory. All that now remained to make it complete was that the master should learn from what quarter the attack on him was directed. He must learn it without being expressly told, while being left in no doubt whatever as to the truth.

At the ten o'clock recreation, the Abbé Jubil noticed with astonishment that there was no one at the foot of the trees. Everyone was playing with great keenness and energy. Laminadin was conspicuous among them, and exerting himself to the utmost in a violent game of stilts. The abbé called out to him:

"Why, you're playing now! You were to be kept in!"

"That's finished, Father," Laminadin said, boldly.

"Finished! Since when?"

"Since yesterday evening. . . ."

And very insinuatingly, in a tone of innocence and sincerity, Laminadin added:

"Look at your notebook, Father!"

And Lhumilié followed with the same reply:

"Look at your notebook, Father!"

And all the others gave a similar answer, for since the morning a rumour had been flying around to the effect that "Flabbyfoot has lost his notebook"—a rumour greeted on every side with exclamations of "Good egg!" "How gorgeous!" and so on, which rewarded for their efforts the bold adventurers of the night before. And finally there was no one left who could be punished, not a single one. The abbé was well aware that the whole affair was a plant, an impudent lie on the part of those young ruffians, who were merely pulling his leg. But he had no proofs. Fortunately for him, it was nearly time for the next lesson.

That lesson was destined to become famous. Of every one that took place throughout that year, it was the stormiest, the most terrible, and at the same time the most delightful. The abbé had made an approximate calculation of the number of hours of detention of which justice had been defrauded through the seizure of his notebook. He felt that that total should be reinstated with the least possible delay. The boys, who had great perception in these matters, sensed a coming storm. They remained immovable, their noses buried in their books. Three-quarters of an hour went by in complete silence, with every appearance of intense and unrelenting concentration on work.

The first boy to falter was Lhumilié—as usual. He snapped his fingers, and fidgeted.

"May I leave the room, Fa 'ier?"

"Go on with you!" the abbé said. "You will stay in for one hour."

"But I want to go outside, Father, I really do!" Lhumilié said.

"That's enough of it! Two hours!"

"Oh, all right, then!" said Lhumilié.

"Write that out for me five hundred times."

"What, Father?"

"That 'Oh, all right, then!' of yours. And with the inverted commas and the exclamation mark."

Some heads were raised. Punishments rained down upon them.

"Durand, Lardier, Laguilleminie, Fabre—you will be kept in

for an hour!" A little burst of laughter was heard, on the left. The whole corner was bombarded.

"Vincent, Patrigot, Renaudier, Froutte—all to stay in for one hour!"

"It wasn't me, Father!"

"Two hours for you!"

"It was Patrigot!"

"Two hours for Patrigot!"

This went on without respite. A master whose mind is set on punishment can always find an excuse for inflicting it. He was dealing it out at random now.

One pupil alone, who was the principal target of the abbé's wrath, gave him no opening of any kind. This was Lamandin. He never moved; he even forgot to sniff. He had laid beside his dictionary his completed copy of an exercise in translation. He was now writing diligently in an exercise book, hardly stopping to dip his pen in the ink. The abbé left his chair, approached noiselessly, and seized the exercise book. And this is what he read: "Jew, bees, Ann, oar, full, out—Jew, bees, Ann, oar, full, out . . ." There was a whole page full of it.

"What is that?"

"I'm learning spelling in my spare time," Lamandin said. "It was Father Dodin who gave us the tip."

"Yes, well?"

"So I just write over and over again—'Jew, bees, Ann, oar, full, out . . .'"

And Lamandin, looking up with an air of innocence, repeated faster and faster, staring at the Abbé Jubil as he did so:

"Jew, bees, Ann, oar, full, out, Jubil's an awful lout, Jubil's an awful lout . . ."

"Ah, that seems to amuse you?" the Abbé Jubil said. "Very well, then, you can copy it out for me a thousand times."

"Yes," said Lamandin, without turning a hair. "A thousand times, Jubil's an awful lout!"

CHAP. VI: THE CONFESSIONS OF LARDIER

THE Abbé Menème, as he made his appearance in the Superior's room at about five o'clock on a depressing afternoon in the month of February, was looking worried and depressed. This priest, with his massive build and florid complexion, and a mind as slow and heavy as his body, was so strangely upset that it made him stammer. As the result of a twinge of conscience which he was finding too painful, and which was, for him, an entirely new experience, his fine neck with its rolls of fat, which was regarded at the College as one of the most solid foundations of an unshakable faith, an earthly symbol of the peace and safety to be found in spiritual realms, that famous, that comforting neck, which was ordinarily as red as the little nightlight in a sanctuary, had turned pale.

"Father," the Abbé Menème said with an effort, "I have a serious problem—a case of conscience—to tackle."

"Really?" said the Superior, rather listlessly, for his liking for the Abbé Menème was moderate to a degree.

This lack of sympathy was due to the incompatibility of their respective temperaments, and the aversion felt by the Superior for the other man was a mixture of irritation and envy. With his excellent digestion, his pious exercises at fixed intervals, and his freedom from the passions; with his confident belief in his possession of wide professorial knowledge and of the spiritual infallibility of a minister of God, directly bestowed on him from on high; with his faculty of remaining blind to everything which might give rise to hesitations or searchings of the heart, the Abbé Menème got on the Superior's nerves to an extent which was really painful.

This priest, ascetic and highly strung, whose virtues were cold, calculated, and systematic, was no stranger to the frightful tortures of doubt, at times when he was not occupied in the administration of a community of considerable size. In this task he drove himself relentlessly, hoping thereby to clear his conscience of the sulphurous odours which stole into it from hell in the

form of a question—"What is the use of it all?" which endangered his eternal salvation, and tainted with a slight suggestion of blasphemy the most insignificant actions in a life and conduct which nevertheless were exemplary. It was with adoration of an intensity that made it almost poisonous to the worshipper, and overloaded with pious syllogisms, that the Abbé Fuche sank himself in God. It was only at times when he was worn out that he felt an ardent faith, for he was one of those unhappy people who must put faith to the test of reason. With poor health, and living entirely on his nerves, he sometimes prayed with the feelings of a commander who is prepared if necessary to face death, while doubting the utility of the sacrifice. He was indeed far from well. In his glands there was no secretion of that triumphant vital strength which, in the case of the Abbé Menème, made him for the most part so perfectly calm and immovable. Whenever he saw him, the Abbé Fuche would say to himself, with feelings of exasperation: "That idiot is on his way to heaven, and he never suffers at all!" as he looked despairingly at the calm serenity of the other man's mouth, his rosy cheeks, his hairy nostrils and ears, his protruding stomach, in which periods of tranquillity followed by fruitful activity succeeded each other with that admirably punctual recurrence which gives a man a mind untouched by qualms or doubts. The sight of the abbé gave the Superior a feeling of mental discomfort of Jansenist origin, relating to the apportionment of necessary and sufficient grace. He was certainly ready to admit that God had decided that there should be a proportion of idiots, even among His own representatives (in order, doubtless, to bring His law within the reach of every creature); but the Abbé Menème's species of imbecility, that imbecility which is generously displayed, as though it were wisdom, in a face beaming with satisfaction, was particularly hateful to him. For the Abbé Fuche it was one of the most torturing of the trials of his office to have to show this priest who was blameless, but whom he loathed with every fibre of his being, a kindness and forbearance which should assume an appearance of fair treatment.

"Is it some affair which concerns you personally?" the Superior asked him, curtly.

"Oh, no, by no means, Father."

"Has it to do with teaching, or with dogma?"

"With both, I should say, Father, for it is one of our pupils who is the subject of this case of conscience."

"Well, explain, then."

"This is what it is, Father. I am wondering whether it is not my duty to break the secret of the confessional. I want you to decide this matter."

"A most serious one, Father!"

"I know, Father."

"You have a really powerful motive?"

"Yes, I have—a very powerful one, and I think it interests the whole of this community."

"Ah!" said the Abbé Fuche, who was now listening earnestly, "and from what point of view?"

"From the point of view of our College's good name. Through the confessional I have just been made trustee of a secret the responsibility for which I cannot bear alone, for this secret, if it were to reach the ears of the public, would certainly bring discredit on our College, and possibly upon all our teaching establishments. We should lose many pupils if sectarians should take it on themselves to exploit this matter to our own detriment."

"In that case, Father, you need hesitate no longer."

"I may betray the secret of the confessional?"

While the Abbé Menème was giving this explanation of his dilemma, the Superior had been thinking hard. He remembered that a certain edict of Pope Paul IV, of the year 1556, ordered the clergy of the period to make use of the secret of the confessional for the exposure of heretics, or merely of the readers of harmful books. So there were precedents. And the casuistry of those well versed in Loyola's teaching, had he summoned that also to his aid, would have shown him ten different ways of getting round the difficulty. He replied severely:

"Who said anything about betrayal, Father? All I am doing is to release you from the bonds of secrecy—nothing more—for reasons which can only serve the interests of the Church . . . of the Church, Father, you quite understand?"

"Yes, Father, I quite understand."

"And now," the Abbé Fuche added, after a few moments' reflection, "when you have finished all you have to tell me, I will take your own confession. If I do that, Father, you will be able to leave me with your conscience completely satisfied."

"Father," the Abbé Menème said, "I have just heard Sosthène Lardier's confession: he is a pupil of the third form."

"He is a day-boy, is he not?"

"Yes, Father, a boy of fourteen and a half. He assured me that he was the assassin of the woman who lived in Ruinart Street, the old woman who was found about ten days ago with her head battered in, and whose murderer the police are vainly trying to discover."

"The assassin, Father, are you sure?"

"Yes, indeed, Father, the assassin, as I said. You can understand my being upset at hearing that."

"But tell me, Father, why should this child have done anything so against all reason, so unbelievable?"

"To get money, in order to bet at the races. He had, so he told me, an absolutely certain tip, a horse called Timbuctoo, which has in fact just won several races."

"It would have been simpler and more natural for him to steal the money at home, from his parents. . . ."

"Fear of being scolded, no doubt . . . and I gather that Lardier's parents are stingy people, and are accustomed to hide their money."

"And there is this too, Father. One gambles to make money. A boy of fourteen and a half doesn't need it as much as all that."

"It so happens that Lardier does, Father. He is a precocious boy, and is already troubled by sensuous thoughts, so he confessed to me. A certain young woman called Alexandra, one of those persons in Grove Street, where it appears that there is a house of ill-fame, had promised Lardier that, on payment of a pretty large sum, she would . . . would . . ."

"Yes, I understand, Father!"

"Then that's all right, Father!" said the Abbé Menème in a tone of relief, and with his normal colour now suddenly restored.

"There is another thing that surprises me," the Superior went

on. "What could Lardier have used for killing the old woman? It needs both determination and strength to split a skull!"

"There are skulls and skulls, Father. The old lady's was perhaps no longer very tough. Lardier declares that he had no trouble at all. It was the ease of the first blow that was his undoing."

"Had he any weapon—an implement of some kind?"

"A small hammer, Father, that is what is always used."

"The whole thing is senseless, with the principles we instil in our young people! Does this boy appear very worried about the consequences of his act?"

"He seemed very depressed. He talked of throwing himself into the river. I cheered him up as best I could. There is a pardon for every sin, however dreadful it be. He will have the whole of his life in which to atone for his crime."

"You certainly did well, Father, in cheering him up . . . though if this boy were to disappear . . . it would perhaps be the best end to the matter. . . . We should let it be supposed that he was mad, and the scandal would do us less harm."

"There is this hapless creature's soul, Father. Suicide takes one straight to hell."

"Yes, there is his soul, that is true! His soul, yes, his soul . . ." the Abbé Fuche murmured, pensively.

After a few moments' silence, he asked:

"Would you like to receive absolution, Father? If there has been any transgression, I am holding myself responsible for it, you understand? Nevertheless, if you wish for absolution?"

"I should like it very much, Father. It will do me no harm, in any case."

When the Abbé Menèmc had completed his last sign of the Cross, the Superior made a decisive statement:

"And now, Father, the secret of the confessional becomes once more inviolable. Not a word to anybody."

"Of course not, Father."

"I for my part am going to give more thought to this matter, and take advice about it. I shall see the Archbishop. It's a frightful business! . . . By the way, Father, will Lardier be coming to see you again?"

"I advised him to come often. He was so upset when I saw him . . ."

"That was quite right, Father. I will tell you how to proceed with him, under cover of the confessional, of course. We must get to the bottom of this business, before the police . . . One more question. Did not Lardier begin his studies, as a very small boy, in a secondary school or some secular establishment?"

"Alas, no, Father. That is the whole trouble!"

"My Lord," said the Abbé Fuche, "I have a serious case of conscience confronting me."

"Hm . . . some little qualms . . . doubts . . . hm!" said Monseigneur Bourdingue, the archbishop of the diocese, with a growl, in that decisive tone of voice which he adopted when people came to him with questions which seemed to him to be of trifling importance. He was in any case high-handed in the way he ruled his people, including those of his canons who were aged and infirm, to whom the Cathedral was an ecclesiastical Invalides. These he treated rather as a callous stableman might treat the more decrepit of his horses. For this prelate of rural origin, with bright, piercing eyes wrinkled at the corners, with rough, churlish manners, and the expression of the sly, crafty peasant, considered that the affairs of the Church were at least as much as he could manage in the time at his disposal, and that it was better to canalize the broad rivers of faith by means of good hard cash than fail in that object with jeremiads, and the usual ecclesiastical antics. On the furtherance of these aims he brought to bear the realistic outlook of a man with a liking for profitable contracts, with an inborn taste for haggling, and who held that the sacraments are commodities as much as anything else, indeed, of far greater value, and cannot, as such, be given away gratis. "If they want curés to show them the way to heaven, they must start by keeping them alive!" was a favourite and not illogical remark of Monseigneur Bourdingue in speaking of certain of the faithful whose souls were more accessible than their purses. Whatever anyone might say, there was more merit in giving one's money to God than in fasting on Fridays; it catches at the stomach even more. And it takes greater trouble to get good Catholics to

make this wholly necessary gesture than it does to sit half-asleep in a fifteenth-century stall, steeped in bliss, while beneath Gothic arches re-echo the pure, clear tones of a well-trained parish choir.

These were the foundations on which Monseigneur Bourdingue based his conduct of affairs, and these methods were appearing at a time when they were specially needed. His predecessor in the diocese had been Monseigneur Latier-Viennois, a prelate of great refinement and distinction, of kindly, smiling tolerance, who had devoted all his efforts to the creation of feelings of good will towards the Church, in widely different social spheres. In this he had been remarkably successful, but during his period of office ecclesiastical funds seemed to have vanished into thin air. This came to the notice of Monseigneur Bourdingue when he succeeded to the diocese. He was greatly disturbed by it, starting as he did from the principle that the ups and downs of faith, as of everything human, are to be read in balance sheets, and that faith makes progress as assets grow. Moreover, he wanted to see the Church in a strong position, and capable of negotiating on a footing of equality with every kind of authority and of handling their agents to her own advantage. In his opinion spiritual prestige, when making its appearance in the temporal sphere, cannot afford to disregard bank balances, while the faithful themselves can receive nothing but benefit from feeling that their convictions are supported and upheld by wide margins of financial safety. For these reasons Monseigneur Bourdingue would allow no interference with instructions issued by him with definite and determined financial objects, and he insisted on everyone's making efforts in that direction. Speaking of his flock, he would rudely exclaim: "These idiots go and get robbed by the banks, while I guarantee them the best of all possible investments. I chuck eternal bliss at 'em as dividends!" Unwearyingly he ploughed the field of believers that he might reap the harvest of oblations, as his farming forebears had ploughed the fields of the Dauphiné for centuries past. He had all the avarice of those people, but he was amassing money for the Church; for into the pockets of this frugal man, a man with but little sensibility but a great worker and excellent organizer, not one halfpenny found its way. On occasions when his heart was

rejoiced by a handsome total of offerings received, it seemed to him that he must have prayed well, and that was all. He had something better than the smoke of incense to offer to God—the wherewithal for action here below; and with the consciousness that he was ensuring a sound financial position for the future, he brought real passion to bear on his work of enlarging the diocesan nest-egg, investing capital and buying houses and land, especially land; for this peasant who had risen to the episcopate retained the peasant's characteristics in all their grimness. People had smiled at him at first; then he had made himself feared. In his management of men he showed neither consideration, discretion, nor tact. But manage them he did, and his coffers were bursting.

On that particular morning, Monseigneur Bourdingue had on his desk a statement of accounts resulting from a recent jubilee. From the financial point of view, this jubilee had not come up to his expectations, and this discovery had put him in a bad temper. The Superior of Sainte-Colline, arriving at a moment when his Archbishop was greatly vexed, was distinctly unlucky, for Monseigneur Bourdingue, when in this sort of condition, was exceedingly rough and ready in his methods of addressing any Christian whomsoever with whom he had to deal. A famous organizer of collective charity, he made a poor display of this virtue so far as he himself was concerned, in his conversation at any rate; for he regarded anything in the shape of amiability as merely soft syrup, suitable only for idlers, and insignificant people who are incapable of directing others. It seemed to him that, compared with his own far-reaching and widespread cares, a case of conscience must be no more than just a trifling annoyance.

With his biretta tilted over one ear, and looking extremely angry, Monseigneur Bourdingue gazed at the Abbé Fuche with a single piercing eye, the other remaining closed, while the wrinkles on his old face twitched with his displeasure. He repeated, in a mocking tone:

"Some slight qualms . . . hm . . . little doubts!"

"It is much more serious than that, my Lord."

"Is it a matter of the Church's interests?"

"It is indeed, my Lord, considering that the good name of our Catholic colleges might be much endangered."

"Go on."

"To give you a clear explanation, my Lord, I shall be placed in the position of having to divulge the secret of a confession."

"Which you received yourself?"

"No, my Lord. It was one of our Fathers . . ."

"Then how do you know?"

"The secret was revealed to me."

"You ordered this?"

"I believed that I was acting rightly, my Lord."

"Then we shall follow the same method. I release you from the bond of secrecy in the Church's interest, and I give you absolution in advance."

The Abbé Fuche told Monseigneur Bourdinguc all that he had heard from the Abbé Mcnème in the matter of the pupil Lardier's abominable crime. The Archbishop's wrinkled eyes were like those of a sportsman shooting from cover, when he hears the crack of some branch in a thicket.

"We must act," he declared. "You will dismiss this pupil immediately."

"I have no reason to give, my Lord."

"You must find some pretext, for it is absolutely necessary for you to get rid of this Lardier before the police are on his track. You must write to the parents and tell them that for some time past this pupil has been keeping bad company outside the College, and that he is corrupting his companions."

"I have no proof of these evil associations, my Lord."

"Oh, but surely you have. There is the crime itself. It wasn't from studying his catechism that this brat got the idea of killing an old woman to enable him to visit a young one."

"No, indeed. . . . Still, my Lord, I am going to take the liberty of pressing my point. Without his confession of it, we should know nothing of Lardier's crime. Are we really within our rights in making use of what we have learned through the confessional?"

"All we have to consider is the general interest, and Pro-

vidence, which has allowed us to gain this knowledge in good time, is now clearly showing us the path we must take. With scruples like yours—which I call weakness—we should be playing into the hands of an enemy who cares nothing for the means he employs, so long as he can harm us. And we are on earth, Father, on earth, where the righteous must be the stronger, always and at all costs. Go back now to Sainte-Colline and take steps at once to expel that wretched boy, whose continued presence in one of our colleges might very soon bring us endless worry and trouble.”

On his return to Sainte-Colline, the Abbé Fuche found waiting for him outside his door the Abbé Givaudan, the master of the second form, who said to him:

“Father, I have some information to give you.”

“Important, Father?”

“Yes, it is. What I have just heard seems likely to give deep distress to one of our Fathers.”

“Oh, in that case come in.”

“Father,” said the Abbé Givaudan when both were inside the Superior’s room, “I believe it to be my duty to disclose to you . . . only . . .”

“Yes? . . . only?”

“I have just taken a pupil’s confession.”

“Which pupil?”

“Sosthène Lardier, of the third form.”

“Again!”

“It is the first time he has confessed to me, Father.”

“Excuse me, Father, I was thinking of something else.”

“So I am wondering whether I am not going to find myself in the position of being compelled to disregard the secrecy of the confessional. Can I do so, Father?”

The Abbé Fuche made a vague gesture. But he remembered what Monseigneur Bourdingue had said to him.

“The general interest must come before everything else. We must never forget that.”

“Still, it is none the less . . . But perhaps, Father, you will be able to hear my confession presently?”

"Yes, Father, of course! I will hear you and give you absolution. So tell me."

"Father," said the Abbé Givaudan, "the pupil Lardier came to me and accused himself of having confessed to the Abbé Menème and made a false confession. I should not have attached great importance to this, had not the subject of this false confession seemed to me to be of a very disturbing nature, especially if the Abbé Menème himself . . . as the secret must have borne so heavily on him . . . was so overwhelming if its burden could not be shared . . . was so serious a matter for the whole community. . . ."

"What was it all about, Father? What was it all about?" the Abbé Fuche broke in, losing all patience.

"It seems, Father, that the pupil Lardier represented himself to the Abbé Menème as the assassin of the old lady who lived in Ruinart Street. And this was—of course it was!—a lie."

His happiness at this sudden deliverance from an overwhelming worry was so great that the Superior gave vent to an imprudent exclamation which he was unable to suppress, and which made him bite his lips as soon as he had uttered it:

"Yes, of course! I might have known as much!"

A silence followed, in which each man was thinking deeply. The Abbé Givaudan, keeping his eyes resolutely turned away from the Superior, who also avoided looking at him, had now assumed a humble, penitent and at the same time ingratiating expression, which enabled him to conceal the satisfaction he felt at having discovered just what he wanted to know—whether the Abbé Menème had said anything. . . . With his hands buried in the wide sleeves of his cassock, and with slight jerks of his shoulder drawing his cape further over his chest, he sighed a little, as much as to say, "How sad it all is!" But in religious communities the qualities of shrewdness and insight are acquired in an exceptional degree. The Abbé Fuche was not in the least taken in by the posturings of the Abbé Givaudan, who was himself completely aware that the Superior was under no illusions about him. And thus were they enabled to convey fully and clearly to each other what each had to say, without departing in the slightest degree from the convention which was observed

at the College. The principal requirement of this convention was a most sparing use of words, of those formidable little objects whose perilous combinations may so easily lead a man to the brink of falsehood and of heresy. They felt that by leaving the other man to do all the guessing, and letting him take the responsibility for interpreting one's meaning, there was no need for fear of reproach or trouble of any kind in the future; for the Fathers of Sainte-Colline were servants of a master who later on will call us to account for every idle word. The Abbé Fuche was the first to break this confidential silence.

"Why did Lardier make a false confession? Did he tell you?"

"Yes, Father, he did. It seems that the object was to make the Abbé Menème appear a mug."

"A mug?"

"Those were exactly the words that Lardier used. It is deplorable!"

"It is quite certain . . ." the Superior murmured, as though he were in a dream.

The two abbés glanced at each other and then turned their eyes away, with that look of embarrassment which may occasionally be seen in the eyes of priests, and which arises from the use of the confessional and a feeling of shame on account of certain suppressed desires. That glance was long enough to include a momentary flash of disloyal and mocking accusation, suitably tempered by the demands of Christian charity; and the outlines of their prudent lips, disciplined by the rapid muttering of prayers, were slightly puckered in smiles which were barely perceptible, and subtle as only a priest's can be.

"And why, Father, did Lardier want to make the Abbé Menème appear what you have just said?"

"It was on account of a bet, Father, between two young scoundrels, Lardier and another boy, before witnesses."

"Who was the other?"

"Father, I hesitate to name a second pupil. I have just revealed to you . . ."

"This is no time for hesitation. Let us dispose of this question once for all."

"The other boy was Pinoche."

"Pinoche, dear me, dear me! And is that all, Father?"

"Yes, Father, that is really everything. I thought it my duty to inform you of this hoax, out of deference to the Abbé Menème, whose sturdy qualities I certainly appreciate and admire . . ."

"We all do, Father!"

The Abbé Givaudan bowed, and continued:

" . . . those sturdy, most useful qualities, but I felt afraid that an excess—very praiseworthy, no doubt—of . . . readiness to believe, might have led him . . . for I was considering every possibility . . . and after that I thought of the importance of this matter, its possible repercussions . . . and I even greatly deplored your visit to the Archbishop, when I heard just now of your absence . . . for this hoax, if by ill luck the secret had got out, and been taken seriously . . . Of course, I had no proof, none whatever. Nevertheless . . ."

The Abbé Fuche listened to the Abbé Givaudan with an occasional encouraging little toss of the head, but which told him less than nothing. He let him continue to flounder about in his insinuations, which were so many questions to which he had no intention of replying.

"Certainly," he said at last, "you might have supposed anything—taken anything into consideration. . . . Well, can I hear your confession now?"

"Oh, by all means, Father!"

As though he were completely safe from punishment and hadn't a care in the world, the day-boy Lardier continued to appear at the College, with his skin clear, his eyes bright, and a look of mischief, while his rosy cheeks shone with the gay unconcern and wonderful happiness of youth. During the week of his two confessions, Lardier did brilliantly in his work, for he was third in Greek translation, second in Latin exercises, and first in religious instruction. For him, this was a rare accomplishment, and it was noticed and very favourably commented upon by the Fathers.

"This child is improving," they said. "He seems now to be well on the way to becoming a first-rate boy."

"If he goes on like this, in two years' time he will be getting his degree, the first time he goes up for it."

The Abbé Menème was completely mystified. He was bearing the burden of a shameful secret which should have been devastating for the culprit; and now it was he, the priest, who was being tortured by that same secret, for he was discovering with horror to what depths of dissimulation a boy of fourteen years old, brought up on rigid Christian principles and under the care of a teaching body of the very highest standard, could descend. The Abbé Menème firmly believed that virtue is the natural prerogative of certain sections of humanity, that it flows naturally from the observance of certain principles and rites, and he could not conceive the possibility of righteous people, *really* righteous people, living and flourishing outside the centres of orthodox thought, of which an establishment like Sainte-Colline happened to be one of the most shining examples. These convictions had greatly helped him in his career as priest and teacher, and even in his spiritual life; with his feeling of certainty that he was on the right path, existence for him was a succession of peaceful, care-free days; he knew that he was on heaven's side, the side of those whose salvation was already assured.

And now here ~~was~~ Lardier with his unbelievable behaviour, his cynicism, his entire lack of moral sense, coming and overturning these firm convictions, these settled ideas! That the criminal should not be easily discernible by a suggestion of the cloven hoof in the way he walked, by a touch of villainy in his look, by something satanical in his expression, were things beyond the abbé's comprehension. In Lardier's merry, laughing face he searched for these indelible tokens, these marks of shame, and saw there nothing but the traces of a mischievous intent, light-hearted, enthusiastic, attractive, and—horrible to note!—candid and sincere.

This mental turmoil, for which he was quite unprepared, had grievous effects on the health of the Abbé Menème and deranged a certain mechanism in his body the power and regularity of which were an object of general admiration. He began to lose his appetite, his digestion deteriorated, and uncontrollable cruciations, of an extremely unpleasant nature, would rise to his lips

while he was making his comments on Cicero and Virgil, but making them with none of the relish and delight which those texts had so long afforded him. Finally, for the first time in his life he had to endure the most acute and painful hæmorrhoidal discomfort, with dagger-like thrusts of pain which made him start up in his chair in the manner of a horseman who rises in his saddle when his mount begins to gallop. These discomforts tried him terribly. The Abbé Menème made acquaintance with pain, both moral and physical, with doubts, obsessions, anguish. His sleep was haunted by goblins with the faces of well-behaved pupils and bodies of little winged demons; these darted hither and thither around his bed with the flight of bats half-human and of sinister, mocking aspect. At times these bold little monsters would crowd and crush together till they attained the bulk of a foul, hairy octopus; and their innumerable wavy, sinuous, restless tails, like tentacles, entwined the abbé in their folds as though to stifle him. Within a few days the hapless priest lost many pounds in weight.

Unable to stand it any longer, one evening the Abbé Menème stationed himself beneath the peristyle as the Middle Division was returning from the playground after recreation. He signed to Lardier to step aside, then drew him into the corner of a corridor.

"Well, my boy, have you nothing to confide to me?"

"No, Father," Lardier replied, with a freedom from uneasiness that was truly disconcerting.

"You feel calmer—your mind more at rest, my boy?"

"Yes, Father," Lardier said once more, turning to the Abbé Menème with a gay, transparent look which lit up a bright happy face wherein the temples, the cheeks, the lips all had that unique, miraculous, supremely moving purity which is childhood's special gift. At the same time the priest, as he bent over the boy, became conscious of that odour of warm, healthy animality which emanates from an adolescent frame, in which nothing yet is withered.

The momentary contact with this freshness and bloom was too much for the Abbé Menème. He left the boy hurriedly, and went off to knock at the Superior's door. Having gained admit-

tance, he remained standing, with every feature giving evidence of great mental agitation and distress.

The Abbé Fuche was watching him with pity, but it was cold and a little contemptuous; and the movements of his Adam's apple, and the small contractions of the muscles of his jaw belied the look of tenderhearted kindness which graced his pale face, with its eyes inflamed by nocturnal meditations and toil.

"Well, Father?" he said at last.

"Father," the Abbé Menème said, "I am very worried. I have seen no more of the pupil Lardier."

"Ah!" said the Superior. "And what about it?"

"Well, Father, I know nothing more whatever of what has happened since that terrible crime. . . ."

"I am sorry, Father," said the Abbé Fuche in a completely detached tone of voice, "what crime are you speaking of?"

The utter and helpless amazement now depicted on the Abbé Menème's features only served to emphasize the ravages which his recent sufferings had wrought upon them. He replied in an undertone:

"But, Father, the crime—the murder of the old woman who lived in . . ."

The Abbé Fuche's expression had suddenly hardened, and every trace of cordiality had departed from it. A note of irony and a hint of vindictiveness could be detected in the tone of voice with which he replied:

"But it's all finished, Father, that business—completely finished. The police are on the track of the murderer, and his arrest is now only a matter of hours."

"Yes, but . . . but . . ." the Abbé Menème murmured, "Lardier's confession . . ."

"Wasn't genuine, Father. A little common sense should have been enough to show you that."

The Abbé Menème's intense bewilderment was not unlike the shock felt by the bull who has just received the first blow of the mallet on his nose. When at length he emerged from it, it was to ask:

"You will administer some punishment, Father?"

"Why punishment?" the Superior asked, icily.

"Lardier has been guilty, Father, of an offence both against religion and against discipline."

The Abbé Fuche spoke now in an abrupt and decisive manner. Side by side with the spirit of justice which prompted him in making his final decision were some long-standing resentments; while the word "mug," whose appropriateness was now revealed as a clamorous, flaming truth, was justified in his mind by the precision and immutability of dogma, on which the Church's everlasting strength is based.

"There has perhaps been an offence committed, but I cannot punish it severely. And the secrecy of the confessional, Father, what do you make of that?"

CHAP. VII: GARFOUILLAT'S SISTER

THE retreat was in full swing. The preacher during this period was Father Ouabat, an awe-inspiring missionary, a full-blooded colossus, bearded to the middle of his chest; his hair indeed protruded everywhere, a brown, stiff, curly growth, which appeared in profusion below his wide sleeves and extended to his strong square hands with their thick finger-joints. This hairy abundance (which reminded one of the precocious Zinopino and gave an idea of the kind of man into which he would doubtless develop) greatly impressed the pupils. They regarded it as a token of the victorious mission of this priest, who was so at home in tropical climes amongst cannibals, sorcerers, great apes, and negresses with fine large pointed breasts. Whenever the boys were reminded of the penetration of the sacrament of baptism into the unexplored regions of continents but little known, thoughts of lurking ambush and bold adventure filled their minds. Thus adorned with a halo of exoticism and a reputation for exploits in far distant lands, and clad with hair like any faun, the Reverend Father Ouabat had the most startling effect on the pupils, pro-

ducing in them little thrills of unnatural terror which ran from top to bottom of their spines. For this preacher was wont to depict the Almighty as a police inspector of never-failing insight whose supervision of all the raggars, the idlers, and the lewd—especially the lewd—was continuous and strict, and who owed each one of them, to be settled at some later date, a very serious grudge. Even when he went to the metropolis to secure attention for his liver, the missionary did not on that account interrupt his evangelistic activities. He scoured all the religious colleges, where he sowed the good seed, the word of a God armed with a thick heavy bludgeon; so congenial was it to the nature of this vigorous priest to believe that the triumph of a just and righteous God should be established through brawls in which good strong blows could be given and received. As eternal life is the only one that ought to count, Father Ouabat did not really attach great importance to this one here below, and often during his missions it had been as much as he could do not to bash the heads of the blackamoors who, fools that they were, persisted in prostrating themselves before the wooden figures of their pitiful negro idols.

The conversions of Father Ouabat were thus brought about by the medium of terror. As an evangelical method it is perhaps as good as any other, and when it was necessary to impress the negroes of Dahomey, of Guinea, and of other torrid regions, there was no point in a missionary giving himself out as the envoy of a God any less malevolent and terrifying than the pagan divinities of those besotted folk. Kindness, so Father Ouabat thought, is an estimable feeling but has little value in education, and is hardly noticed by any but a small number of highly civilized people, whose instincts in any case incline them towards decadence. On the other hand, fear is the great primitive, fundamental human feeling, firmly rooted and completely effective; it has always been a leader of men and ruler of communities. The Reverend Father Ouabat had no use for a flabby, complacent, feeble god. No, the God he extolled was magnificently autocratic; and it was in the name of a fulminating administrator of justice, encircled in thunder and lightning and surrounded by legions of relentless angels, that he preached with such energy and power.

If preaching it could be called . . . yelling would be more exact, if there were not something that seemed a little shocking, in this connection, in the employment of such a term; though quite wrongly, for to devote the whole strength of one's lungs and vocal cords to the service of a cause whose greatness is beyond dispute, can only be a meritorious and exemplary action.

In the pulpit at Sainte-Colline the Reverend Father Ouabat made the devil's own din—with the result that edifying quotations in which were expressed the noble thoughts of Saint Augustine and certain other Fathers of the Church issued forth from his lips with a crashing roar that made them sound like threats from on high, while fragments of these resounding periods, re-echoing from the low arches of the building, came hurtling down like the lava of Gomorrah, in the form of excommunication, extermination, and frightful punishments, on to the heads of boys of a religious school who sat there petrified, dumb-founded, overwhelmed, each one with muscles taut and heart-strings torn.

These results, as the reader should not fail to note, were highly to the credit of Father Ouabat, who had taken upon himself to speak of hell and of the throes of death to boys to whom, with their ages varying from eight to eighteen, their latter end appeared extremely remote. And yet (and herein lay the merit) he succeeded in making them realize that our last moments on earth not only have nothing joyful about them, but are the threshold of unimaginable and everlasting terrors.

During the momentary intervals between these most alarming vociferations, the chapel was filled with the silence of death. Even the inveterate idlers felt a little disturbed and unsettled in mind, with the exception, however, of the incorrigible Pinoche and Lamandin, who were comfortably installed, with no possibility of ejection therefrom, in their fortress of methodical laziness, mocking insubordination, and scornful scepticism, with the joint conviction that such privilege was theirs by the will of God, which must not be opposed. They had succeeded in getting this point of view accepted by the whole College, where they enjoyed immunity from punishment to an extent which would

hardly be believed. These two boys, who were constantly together, merely scoffed at the preacher's fulminations, thus displaying that fine force of character which, in boys, is the precursor of miscreants or of great men. It must at the same time be remembered that these two irrepressible youths were still too young for their characters to have been finally determined. They were slothful, and disheartening to their masters; but very observant, impish, and subtle in a number of ways, and taken all in all they seemed more wide awake than a good many clever, hardworking pupils of the type of Alphonse Bigotin and Jules Prunot, whose names appeared high on the lists every week. Furthermore, Pinoche and Lamandin were no more afraid of hard knocks than they were of punishments. In single combat they belaboured their comrades with determination, vigour, and skill. On this account, though it was not officially recognized, they enjoyed rare prestige. And their fellow pupils knew how shrewd and cunning they were, only seeming to be oblivious when it suited them to appear so.

That evening the Reverend Father Ouabat was speaking of sudden death, which lies constantly in wait for the hardened sinner. In order to show unto what bottomless pits a bad Christian may be hurled in everlasting oblivion, the missionary was making great efforts to enable the boys to grasp the meaning of the word *eternity*. In this kind of demonstration Father Ouabat was a past-master. The best dialecticians of the pulpit were never tired of listening to him, and several French preachers of some standing modelled themselves on him when preaching on this subject. The Reverend Father Ouabat was well aware that he was forming a school, and he was constantly endeavouring to bring his methods to perfection, studying every detail of intonation and of general staging. He took into account both lighting and time of day, for he had noticed that the evening hours with their brooding, ominous atmosphere, and their light which steals in surreptitiously and brings pallor to the human face, helped him to secure effects whose pathos was still more convincing. He thought it better that the seeds of religious terrors should be sown in the minds of children just before their sleep. If they

were visited by nightmares in which they saw flames and satanic sarabands, it would be an excellent thing for their future salvation. One cannot take too much trouble in implanting that unreasoning fear which is to last for the whole of life.

"Picture to yourselves, my brethren," Father Ouabat was saying that evening, as he waved the sleeves of his surplice in wide, sweeping gestures, "picture to yourselves a sphere of bronze of the dimensions of this Earth on which we live. Then think of a little swallow which should come once every thousand years to graze lightly with its wing this enormous mass of metal, and ask yourselves how many milliards and milliards of years would be required for this little bird, with the light contact of its wing every ten centuries, to wear out and destroy this sphere of bronze? Well, my dear brethren, that length of time beyond anything we can conceive would be as nothing, compared with eternity. And if you were to add ten other similar spheres—a hundred, a thousand of them—and there were only one single bird, still that would give no means of measuring eternity, which, my dear children, is something that will never end . . . never . . . never. The race of men will vanish, the seas run dry, the mountains collapse in ruin, the stars crumble into dust, the sun be extinguished, and the aeons of time needed for all that colossal destruction will still be as nothing in face of eternity—and therefore nothing, my brethren, compared with what hell will be for the sinner!"

Having reached this vital point in the development of his theme, the preacher allowed a heavy silence to descend upon his congregation, a silence during which they scarcely breathed! Then Nature got the better of the dread and terror which was weighing them down. Boys with colds could be heard clearing their throats, and numerous sniffers disposing by that means of an inconvenient nasal flow. A few others, with a mistaken sense of enjoyment, hastily slipped excavatory fingers into nostrils, and then, as though by inadvertence, inserted those same fingers between their lips. Finally, the pupil Friscot, of the Junior Division, who was wriggling about (having neglected to take the usual precaution, as required by the College rules) and hovering between an untimely overflow in his breeches and the bursting

of his bladder, slipped outside, almost running, and blushing with shame.

In the meantime the Reverend Father Ouabat was making some final arrangements. He had retired to the back of the pulpit, where he could not be seen, and there, majestically unfolding a large handkerchief with squares, he blew his nose violently, making a noise which did in fact suggest the trumpets of the Last Judgment. He then tested the working of his two nostrils, replaced in a deep pocket his handkerchief carefully rolled into a ball, and then, returning to the front of the pulpit, resumed his edifying task in stentorian tones:

"And so, my brethren, let your minds dwell upon this, ceaselessly: *We know neither the hour nor the place*, as it is written: God is here, reading our inmost thoughts. Should it please Him to take the life of any one of us, He can do it immediately, here. . . . Here, in this very place, anyone whom in His wisdom and His justice He has appointed, may fall, stricken unto death, and his eternal destiny will be there and then determined. And should he have died in mortal sin, then for him it will mean Hell—for ever!"

At this point the preacher allowed a second period of silence to go by. And indeed, it was by a skilful gradation of silences that he was now about to proceed with his sermon, that gradation which was so much envied and admired, of which he alone possessed the secret, and which was known amongst the French clergy as "the famous apostolic silences of Father Ouabat." (N.B.—Désiré Ouabat, who at that time had not yet found his true vocation, had been in his youth a pupil at the Paris Conservatoire. For reasons into which we need not enquire, but which may have been vexation at not having attained the highest honours at the competition of 1887, which brought home to him the nothingness of human effort, Désiré Ouabat unexpectedly left the stage to devote himself to the eloquence of the pulpit. His talent for elocution was the only vanity which he had retained from his former profession. This small weakness was amply atoned for by the unquestionably valuable service which was rendered by that talent to the Church's cause.)

Father Ouabat continued:

"Ah, my children, if any one of you should be such a miserable wretch as to smile at this moment, I pity him! (*Silence.*) If any one of you were so depraved as not to be conscious at this moment of the wonderful, the terrible grandeur of God, let him tremble! (*Silence.*) For death is here, death is here in our midst, death will smite him who is guilty!"

At this point there was a further silence, a silence indicative of a merciless avenging Presence. Then Father Ouabat resumed his discourse with greater vehemence than ever, with one finger outstretched towards the assembled crowd of boys and trembling in a spirit of vengeance which seemed as though it were precisely aimed at this or that row of pupils:

"God knows you, God judges you! Depart from your evil ways, ye sinners! . . . Ah, I see some of you blushing! (*Silence.*) I see some of you turning pale! (*Silence.*) I see others looking away in shame! (*Silence, followed by a piercing cry.*) I see some black sheep among you! (*A still more terrible cry.*) I can make out a face with traces of abominable impurity clearly marked upon it! Let him rise, let him kneel in prayer, and repent!"

At that moment, in the row in which Pinoche and Lamandin were sitting, there was some mysterious and urgent whispering:

"Garfouillat, that sister of yours!"

"What about your sister, Garfouillat?"

"Garfouillat, you dirty swine!"

Then something incredible, something poignant happened; a thing which made the whole school wince in horror. They saw a frail, shadowy figure, timidly huddl'd up in a cape the collar of which entirely hid the face, leave its bench and go and kneel down alone in the very centre of the middle aisle, where it remained bending forward and shaken by convulsive sobs—a revelation of grief too painful, too overwhelming for a child to bear.

And now the young sinner had just risen, had just displayed himself as a target for shafts of disgrace and shame. It was little Garfouillat, whose age was thirteen years.

The eloquence of Father Ouabat died a sudden death. Help was urgently needed for Garfouillat, who was ill. And so it was that the evening sermon ended in a hubbub of scandal, upon

which the curtain of night was falling in an atmosphere of threats, remorse, and painful searchings of heart and conscience.

Amid all this tumult and confusion, which had come as a shock to the Fathers themselves, two pupils remained cool, lucid, and self-possessed: they were Pinoche and Lamandin. With a barely perceptible wink at each other, their fresh, youthful lips were slightly parted in a grin of rejoicing.

"Talk of a fathead!" said Pinoche, softly.

"Wretched little funk!" Lamandin whispered.

It was of Garfouillat that these young cynics were speaking, the luckless boy who had just been taken to the infirmary.

So great is the ingenuity of childhood that it often proves too much for the seasoned cunning of grown-up men. Youth is the age of invention, of imagination, of discovery, and also, doubtless, of foolery and nonsense; but this foolery nearly always borders on the marvellous; and that is why young people are continually escaping by this means from the tiresome restrictions which adults, with their gloomy outlook and their flabby way of living, would like to impose on the impatience and the vitality of youth.

At Sainte-Colline, as at all colleges, there were various stories of a more or less scandalous nature current among the pupils and not known by the masters, despite certain oily sneaks against whom the "bloods" were very wisely on their guard. In the Middle Division a very scabrous little refrain had been circulating for some time past, which contained the key to the Garfouillat incident just related. The author of this refrain was concealed by a prudent anonymity, but if it be remembered that Pinoche and Lamandin, thanks to their laziness, were in full enjoyment of very extended periods of leisure, there can be no doubt that it was the collaboration of these two boys that had been responsible for the detestable fragment of song which was a source of delight to a few others also in the secret, who made use of it for the purpose of a secret persecution of Garfouillat. Here is the fragment in question—a very surprising one indeed it was, to hear hummed at a religious college. And just because it *was* surprising, it must be quoted without shift, evasion, or gloss.

I saw her bare,
And lots of hair,
But where, oh where? . . .
Garfouillat's big sister.
Meowooo, meowooo, meowooo,
The keyhole I could see right through! (*twice*)

As will be supposed, this abominable specimen of wit was not entirely gratuitous. It is unhappily only too true that Garfouillat, in a moment of vanity which had impelled him to disclose something about which he should have kept entirely silent, had supplied the material for it to two others whom he had taken into his confidence, Pinoche and Lamandin. Before further explanation is given, some account of Garfouillat is required.

He was a puny, pale, highly strung child, in some ways very forward for his age and in others very backward, and was accustomed to indulge in queer soliloquies in corners of the playground, where his dread of violent games kept him apart from the other boys. This unfortunate little Garfouillat was an example of the decay of a lineage, for he was born (at a time when Mme Garfouillat imagined that her confinements were finished for ever) long after his brothers and sisters, who came to birth under far more favourable conditions than he. Matters were made much worse for him by the fact that Mme Garfouillat's conception of this last child of hers was unaccompanied by enthusiasm of any kind, and had occurred at a time when she was a prey to frightful torments of jealousy, for there were certain almost unmistakable indications leading her to suppose that M. Garfouillat, an exemplary husband for fifteen years past, was now beginning to consort freely with ladies of no class whatever. The poor woman's nervous distress was passed on to the child she was bearing in her womb, with the result that little Isidore Garfouillat was destined in life to a heritage of mental strain and stress which he had imbibed with the impoverished and scanty milk with which his unhappy mother had nourished him.

However, if Garfouillat was physically ill-favoured, so much so that it made him timid and that he was frequently the laughing-stock of his companions; if his intelligence was unequal to the

task of concentration on the subjects in which he was receiving instruction, he enjoyed by way of compensation a piercing keenness of perception; and he had haunting memories and obsessions of a very peculiar kind, especially for a boy of his age. Lastly, he inherited from his mother an unhealthy taste for espionage. But while Mme Garfouillat's activities were specially directed to searching her husband's pockets, the young Garfouillat could never restrain himself from gluing his eyes to keyholes.

This he had been doing during his last holidays, when he had placed an eye in close contact with an altogether captivating keyhole, that which furnished a view of the bedroom occupied by Hélène Garfouillat, his sister. She was an exceedingly pretty young person of nineteen, who had now reached the culminating point in the development of her feminine beauty, thanks to a recent increase of growth which had brought her breasts to perfection and given them, together with an admirable firmness, an outline whose loveliness called for adoration. Thinking that she was alone, and being entirely nude, the damsel was bestowing on her beauty unadorned, whose splendid ripening was an astonishment even to herself, the most gentle, minute, and earnest attention. All this care was doubtless, not unaccompanied by certain daydreams, for there came a moment when Hélène Garfouillat, standing before her mirror, with lazy, caressing movements applied a comb to the tufted portions of her frame, while her beautiful face took on that expression of intense and almost sorrowful seriousness which is seen in passionate beings when they are thinking of happiness.

Behind the door, bewildered with admiration, Garfouillat was feeling a strange and unaccustomed fever in his blood, and tears came into his eyes because he could not reveal his presence, open that door, and throw himself at his sister's feet; for some vague instinct told him that that young girl's body was a magnificent, an adorable thing.

The little wretch returned to that same keyhole every day. He watched every action of his sister's including those she would most fain have concealed, and those hints of discouragement or yearning which can only be expressed in secret, away from all prying eyes. The result of all this was that on Garfouillat's

return to the College, his mind was filled with "the female form divine," and that he felt a greater need than ever of the solitude which would allow him to evoke at leisure all those things the knowledge of which, despite his own defects, placed him far above his companions.

But it was just in this matter that Garfouillat was so lacking in prudence and self-restraint. He wanted to make a stir on his own account, and as he had less than his share of physical strength, to outstrip in his own particular way Pinoche, Lamandin, and other high and haughty gentlemen of lesser importance who were showing him nothing but contempt. The ravishing charms of Hélène Garfouillat gave him an opportunity for a striking revenge. He told them what he had seen, but it was so superior to the holiday exploits of the others that at first they refused to believe him. He was questioned, and had to give precise details.

"Really and truly, you saw her naked?"

"Yes, naked, as I said—naked!"

"Not much to look at, eh?"

"Go and see for yourself!"

"Look here, Garfouillat, did you see everything about your sister?"

"Everything, I tell you, and lots of times, too!"

"Jolly well worth it, I suppose?"

"You bet!" the little sinne: answered, drunk with pride.

With fervent enthusiasm, the small brother's hands traced in mid-air an outline of bewilderingly lovely curves, whose soft, tender bulk could have crushed him, frail that he was. The young scamps came very near to being impressed.

"Like the statues of naked women on the monument it was, I suppose!"

"Yes, and better still, because it was alive, and there was all the colour, and it moved, and there were different positions all the time."

For boys like Pinoche and Lamandin, whose reputation was well established, it was galling to have to watch the triumph of a wretched little fellow like Garfouillat.

"You're a pretty fair swine!" Pinoche said.

"Yes, you certainly are a swine!" Lamandin said.

"To go ogling tarts, or even doing a bit more—well, I don't mind that," said Pinoche. "But to stare your eyes out at your own sister—it isn't playing the game."

"Anyway, I wouldn't do it, I certainly wouldn't," Lamandin declared. "And there's no one here who'd dare to call *me* a funk!"

"You're disgusting, Garfouillat," said Pinoche.

"Yes, you certainly are," Lamandin added.

"And anyhow, your sister's ugly!"

"You liar!" Garfouillat cried out at the top of his voice, fully prepared, despite his lack of strength, to hurl himself against the vile calumniators of the figure he cherished and loved. The others saw that he was on the point of succumbing to one of those attacks of nervous rage from which the weak are apt to suffer, and which resemble epileptic fits. They feared complications, and Lamandin remarked quietly:

"And you must remember, we don't know your sister!"

"She will be coming to see me one Sunday."

"We'll have a good look at her!" said Pinoche.

"Yes, we'll have a good look at her!" Lamandin said.

It was then that Pinoche and Lamandin, who were feeling very resentful, composed their famous song. It was not long before other young scapegraces began dinning it into Garfouillat's ears. The boy was now beginning to feel remorse, and not only remorse but disgust and despair. He was reproaching himself bitterly for having besmirched his precious secret without anything gained thereby—for having handed over his sister, as it were naked, to a collection of cynical and malicious youngsters. It frightened him to think that in the thoughts of his fellow pupils, when they saw her, this beautiful girl would be spared no profanation—a girl who had had the most careful upbringing with the nuns of the Sacré-Cœur; it dismayed him to feel that a veil of charming modesty would be an insufficient protection for her body from these vile attacks. Fifteen young scoundrels knew Hélène Garfouillat down to the smallest details, while she, poor innocent lamb, was blissfully unaware of it!

Lastly, the worst trial of all was the thought that Hélène was actually coming to Sainte-Colline, that the boys would be mov-

ing heaven and earth to get a sight of her, that they would be giggling and chuckling ignominiously, and that his own conduct (the baseness of which he was now realizing to the full) might possibly come to light. He spent many days in acute mental suffering, and as he made his way to the parlour one Sunday, he was trembling.

Standing up beside her mother, Hélène was waiting for him, looking deliciously fresh and blooming in a plain, simple frock, but bright and gay, and beautifully set off by the gracefulness and charm of its young wearer's figure. She was adorned in liberal measure with the seductive charm of her sex, to which diffidence as yet prevented her from giving full expression; while beneath it one was conscious of a seething, bubbling under-current of eager enthusiasms and bold and impetuous affections. She seemed to be in a gay mood, but sudden languors, and a momentarily serious expression appearing in a flash in her fine eyes, gave her that allurements which an atmosphere of mystery—the possession of some touching secret—confers. She began to defend her brother, who had had a bad report.

"Oh, leave him alone, mother! You see that Zido is not looking very well. When he is stronger he will work better, won't you, Zido?"

"Are you taking your cod-liver oil quite regularly?" Mme Garfouillat asked plaintively, for this melancholy lady could never see her youngest child without thinking of the infidelities which had accompanied his belated birth.

"Yes, mother, at the infirmary," Garfouillat said, though as often as he could, he eluded the vigilance of Sister Eudorée and threw that filthy stuff out of the window.

"Put your tongue out," Mme Garfouillat said. "It isn't at all good, your tongue. Do you go regularly every day?"

"Almost," Garfouillat replied, though he was lying, for he had an unconquerable dislike of the privies at the College, and refrained from going there until absolutely compelled to do so. It must be admitted that in summer the smell, and in winter the trying cold winds, to some extent justified this aversion. At Sainte-Colline much was made of the merits of hygiene, but practical details were sadly neglected.

"Have they given you an aperient?"

"Yes, mother," Garfouillat answered.

"And how many times did you go?"

"Eight," said Garfouillat, this being an overstatement, for he had not swallowed more than half the medicine.

"Now then," said Hélène, "have you finished with all that talk?"

"You will see, Hélène," said Mme Garfouillat, putting on her most mournful air, "you will see when you have children of your own. . . . As my poor mother used to say, and she had had nine: 'When the stomach goes wrong, everything else does.' And you too, Hélène, I used to keep an eye, a very careful one, on your motions, when you were little. Till you were nearly two you always had diarrhoea, and the doctor couldn't make it out. But Zido's always been just the opposite. In some ways, Hélène, I preferred it your way, for my poor mother used so often to say: 'It's better to be a bit loose. Easy actions make clear complexions. Difficult ones make sad and sorry folk.'"

Mme Garfouillat possessed an immense repertory of intestinal maxims which she was supposed to have inherited from her mother, an old-fashioned lady who had always attached extreme importance, and paid the most earnest attention, to matters affecting the stomach. But Hélène Garfouillat found this subject offensive. She made a suggestion:

"I know somebody who may be hungry. . . ."

"I am," Garfouillat said, shyly, as he cast greedy eyes on an alluring pink packet which his sister was holding.

"Unfortunately," Hélène added, "we could only get chocolate creams, and I don't think Zido likes them much."

"Oh, I say!" Garfouillat cried, in a little outburst of sincere indignation. But he was reassured by noticing his sister's look of sly tenderness, and the packet was opened there and then, while the boy sat there hardly able to contain himself in his greed.

With his face well besmeared, from his ears to the tip of his nose, with cream and other delights, Garfouillat was feeling profoundly happy. Gorged, satiated, delighted at having escaped reproaches for his bad reports, he was smiling at his mother and sister, his mouth full of cream. He had forgotten Pinoche,

Lamandin, all his persecutors; he had forgotten the threat which weighed so heavily on him; he had even forgotten the wrong he had done to the kind and lovely Hélène.

Then, suddenly, Garfouillat's terrors came back to him in all their stark reality. The luckless boy found himself surrounded by clever and ruthless enemies. A door close to where his sister was sitting was roughly pushed open, and a grimacing face, besmeared with charcoal, appeared in the opening, and a shrill voice recited these words:

Meowoo, meowoo, meowoo,
The keyhole I could see right through.

Then another face, just as frightful and just as black, came and stood close to the first one, and a pair of voices cried out together, ferociously, for the second time:

Meowoo, meowoo, meowoo,
The keyhole I could see right through.

Garfouillat choked, turned deadly pale, and began to shed floods of tears, which streamed down his pitiful little face like the torrents which flow down the mountain-sides with the melting of the snows.

"Well! Zido," Hélène Garfouillat asked, "what is the matter with you?"

"Meowoo . . . meowoo . . ." Garfouillat could just manage to utter, in the midst of all his sobbing.

"You silly old Zido," his sister said, laughing, "you were frightened! But it's funny, that 'Meowoo, meowoo, the keyhole I could see right through!' It's most amusing! Is it one of the College songs?"

All this kindness put the final touch on Garfouillat's despair. Weeping more copiously than ever, he threw himself into his sister's arms. He wanted to beg her pardon. He had no time to do so. . . .

"Oh dear, oh dear!" Mme Garfouillat exclaimed, groaning, and in a state of utter bewilderment, "the child is ill! He certainly doesn't go to the lavatory every day."

"Oh, Mother, whatever are you saying?"

"But, H  l  ne, I mean it. I assure you it can come from that. 'Sluggish bowels, melancholy moods,' my poor mother always used to say. I must speak to Father . . . to which Father, H  l  ne?"

"What about, Mother?" asked H  l  ne, who was trying to comfort her brother.

"Why, about Zido's stomach, of course, H  l  ne!"

"I really don't know, Mother! To the Bursar, perhaps. . . ."

The ladies' visit came to an end shortly afterwards. But Garfouillat's troubles were not yet over. At the further end of the classroom was assembled a choir which had been got together in a spirit of mockery, and this choir was humming behind his back the impudent words with which we are already acquainted. The choir pursued Garfouillat in the playground, in the dormitory, everywhere. Within a few days the wretched boy became half-demented, and the terrifying eloquence of Father Ouabat put the finishing touch to his profound uneasiness of mind.

At the infirmary, where he had been taken direct when the boys left the chapel, Garfouillat had developed a high temperature. In his delirium he was shouting at the top of his voice:

I saw her bare,
And lots of hair . . .

The excessively odd nature of this delirium greatly alarmed Sister Eudorc   who, with her spectacles on her nose, was in the act of inserting her thermometer between his lips. She soon hastened to inform the Fathers, who feared contagion—of language at the very least—and decided to send Garfouillat home for the period of his illness.

It would be impossible to describe the dreadful, helpless amazement of Mme Garfouillat when she heard her youngest son express himself, in his delirium, in the following words:

Garfouillat's big sister,
With lots of hair,
But where, oh where? . . .
Meowoo, meowoo, meowoo,
The keyhole I could see right through.

"Ernest," she said to her husband, "come and listen to what Zido is saying. I can't make head or tail of it."

"Neither can I," M. Garfouillat declared, when the patient had repeated several times over the shameful refrain written by Pinoche and Lamandin. "But there is one thing we must do at once, and that is, send Hélène away. Aunt Marceline has been wanting to have her for a long time. She must go this evening."

Hélène Garfouillat was a lovely girl. She had dark hair and an ardent nature, and she spent much time in thinking about marriage, which for a well-brought-up girl is the only respectable way in which to let her thoughts dwell on love. When staying with her aunt in Paris she made the acquaintance of Gérard Duparc, who had just missed being a Polytechnician (having failed in the entrance examination) and who had an excellent position in a tap-making business, was a good-looking fair young man, and seemed to be very fond of her. Besides this, he was accustomed, in dancing, to hold his partner very close, which in provincial drawing-rooms is not done. He got Hélène Garfouillat to dance with him a great deal, but he was the one to succumb and lose his head at his own little game. He asked for the young girl's hand, and married her the following winter. The young couple set up house in a rather attractive apartment with windows overlooking the trees of the Luxembourg.

A few months later, the young people were still at that period of love's history at which enthusiasm and gratitude hold sway. It was a Sunday morning, and the April sunshine was gently pursuing them till it reached their bed, where they were lingering late. At that moment Hélène was feeling the keenest pleasure and delight. In this state of sweet and gentle rapture, there sprang to her lips, unawares, some words revived from the past, words which she had been unconscious of knowing, and which her present feelings had stirred up within her memory. These words, without being fully aware of what she was doing, she uttered tenderly, close to her husband's ear:

Meowoo, meowoo, meowoo,
The keyhole I could see right through.

"I beg your pardon, darling?" Gérard Duparc asked, very astonished.

"I didn't say anything, darling!"

"Oh, but you did! You said: 'Meowoo, meowoo, meowoo, the keyhole I could see right through.' Could you tell me what it means?"

"Oh," said Hélène, languidly, "it was a song of Zido's, my little brother."

"Where had he learnt it?"

"At the College, I believe, from the Fathers."

"A funny sort of song!" said Gerard Duparc. "Anyway, what does it all mean?"

"It means . . . it means . . . 'I love you,'" Hélène answered, without the slightest trace, so far as could be gathered, of logic of any kind.

But her logic, like all feminine logic, was inspired by her feelings at the moment. These were now proclaiming, with powerful insistence, that a spring morning should not be wasted in idle talk about the education which is given to the pupils of Catholic colleges in the provinces, however odd it may seem to be.

This account of events which took place subsequent to the school year 1912-13 is something of an anachronism, but it has been given in order to show the consequences, outside the College, of the execrable methods of amusing themselves adopted by our two young villains, Pinoche and Lamandin. The refrain which they had made—and quickly forgotten—only to indulge in other and scarcely more desirable activities, had brought about the departure of Hélène Garfouillat, her marriage, and her settlement in Paris. Neither she nor her husband was ever to know that it was to this that they owed their meeting.

As for Garfouillat, he returned to finish the year at the College. Memories fade so quickly that after a few weeks no one had a very clear idea of the reasons for his sudden departure. His strange behaviour in the chapel was attributed to a fever for which he was sickening that day, and which had been the earliest symptom of the illness from which he had since been suffering.

CHAP. VIII: THREATS OF SCANDAL

It was decreed by Fate that during the course of the third term there should break out a scandal of a particularly sinister kind, which shook the whole College and laid the Upper Division open to a threat of terrible reprisals.

In connection with this affair, in which a question of morals was involved, many rumours were spread about, and there was talk of dismissing several pupils in the higher forms. But despite guesses and conjectures of every kind, the inner workings of a secret which was closely guarded were never discovered. The responsibility for all this lay with the *Malgaches*.

The sect of the *Malgaches* was in the third year of its existence and its functions were still being carried out to perfection, without the knowledge either of the masters or of the other boys. Though no one was aware of this, it had rendered invaluable service.

Three years earlier, the "sneaks" had become so numerous at the College, they were drawing the unruly and the whimsical so tightly within the net of their sly and crafty espionage, that even the slightest misdemeanour was becoming impossible. It was easy enough to guess, by their collusion with certain priests, who were the little wretches that were thus "sucking up," but it was difficult to lay hands on them. This continued state of ignominious frustration was particularly irksome to a certain boy of determined disposition, Bob Lamiral by name, who was chafing in his impatience for an opportunity for revenge. This was constantly in his thoughts; and at last it occurred to him that it would be a good idea to combat a secret power already in existence by means of another secret power which should attain its ends by the exercise of terror, at the same time making impossible any previous betrayal of the quarter from which the attacks would be delivered. Having given this plan much thought, he unbosomed himself to two boys whom he could trust, and together they studied the details of a proposed combination. A few weeks later, with the observance of every possible precaution, the

Malgaches were formed, and immediately began their campaign with this very definite programme—to wipe out the sneaks.

The strength of such a combination lay in the complete secrecy of its existence, and every precaution had been taken to safeguard this. The *Malgaches* were thirteen in number, six superior members, the "Ga's," and six subordinate ones, the "Ches," forming a group under the supreme authority of the *Malgache*, who was Bob Lamiral himself. They had sworn obedience and fidelity to their chief. They had also sworn by their eternal salvation not to betray or reveal anything at all to anyone whomsoever, even in confession. Bob Lamiral having studied the question thoroughly, made this pronouncement: that since the association was not subversive of the dogma of the Church, and could not incur a charge either of schism or of heresy, it did not come *per se* within the category of sins. As regards those sins for which the association might become responsible—and this was a matter for the private judgment of each member—all they would have to do would be to confess them under the general headings of disobedience, falsehood, or insubordination, without precisely specifying what they were. "If you want a proof that one may dissemble," said Bob Lamiral, "you've got it in the fact that there are Jesuits in the world, Jesuits not dressed as priests. So you see! One can surely have secrets which aren't sins!" He ended up on a persuasive and very emphatic note: "And then you must remember, all those are *venial* sins—there's nothing to make a fuss about!" This little council cut short any hesitations or scruples that may have remained. The *Malgaches* entered on their task of purification.

Thirteen determined boys, with a mutual understanding which is entirely unsuspected, who are firmly resolved to come to each other's assistance in all circumstances and give favourable evidence on each other's behalf, and are always setting their wits to work to throw people off the scent, are in a decidedly strong position when engaged, as these were, in a common undertaking as exciting as it was praiseworthy, and based upon honourable sentiments. Their punitive expeditions were crowned with success, indeed so much so that fears quickly changed sides and

appeared in the opposite camp. The sneaks trembled, and gradually relapsed into a prudent silence.

The first victim of the *Malgaches* was Eustache Mouillave, Sneak Number One, as to whose treachery there were no doubts whatever. He was always to be seen hobnobbing with some vulgar masters who, preparatory to taking drastic action, were not in the least ashamed to exploit the meanness of a contemptible child. Mouillave, who was easily frightened, was always on the look-out and never went about alone. But within the space of a few days he was caught in a series of hustlings, cleverly arranged. From each of these he emerged badly bruised, with his hair severely pulled, a hard blow in the ribs, a bump or a scratch. He could never say exactly who it was that had struck him. Each time he tried to name someone, some very emphatic witnesses would turn up and prove him wrong. Lastly, the word "sneak," often uttered at his back and generally accompanied by some act of violence, showed him where the danger was coming from.

At the same time this hunting was being directed against other boys also. It was all quite simply done, without noise or sudden disturbance, and with no sign of previous planning. But Lardanchois, an arrant hypocrite, fell down a whole story on his back, and had to put in several days at the infirmary, so sore and tender was his posterior after this accident. Lombin found the inside of his desk flooded with ink, and this ink had just managed to drown his store of chocolate, together with some precious little objects which he possessed. L. Loron could no longer sit down without the fleshy parts of his frame coming in contact with worn-out pen nibs, coated with the dregs of the inkpots. He soon had his posterior dotted over with marks like tattooings, and scabs. This resulted in some bad boils which gave him much suffering and earned him the shameful nickname of "pus bottom." Prouteux, one day after recreation, found himself locked up in one of the playground privies, where he spent the whole of the eleven o'clock lesson in icy cold. Besides this, there was directed at him over the walls of his prison a quantity of pebbles and of refuse, and even a long jet of urine which gave him a most unpleasant species of shower-bath. As many of the pupils asked leave to go out during the lessons, it was impossible

to determine who the culprits were. Finally, Soutanon, the most sanctimonious of all the informers, was himself denounced, with complete dishonesty, by several *Malgaches*, who pointed to him as the boy responsible for several very serious misdemeanours. They brought forward so many and such plausible proofs that, so far as the masters were concerned, the boy's good name was lost for ever. From that time onwards those masters could only regard Soutanon as a worthless and double-faced young person. The crowning point of his disgrace was reached when, with every appearance of having been scandalized and shocked, his accusers declared that he had blasphemed the name of God and made some improper remarks about the Virgin Mary. This accusation, which was the quintessence of perfidy, dealt him a blow from which he was never to recover, however great a display of pious zeal he might subsequently make.

A vague, intangible spirit of hostility gradually enveloped the Division in an atmosphere of brooding, indefinable terror, a terror which was all the more alarming in that the acts of vengeance were carried out unawares, without either quarrel or provocation. Whenever boys stood together in a group, the system of kicks in the bottom was put into operation with the utmost vigour. These kicks appeared to drop from the sky, for the victim could see nothing around him but peaceful, quiet faces, nothing but boys innocently engaged in some game or conversation of their own. But the suspects were black and blue; they had a thousand different troublesome setbacks and uneasiness and "funk" played a large part in their lives.

One thing from which the *Malgaches* derived their great strength was this, that they never boasted, never threatened, and did not exult over the boys whom they tormented. The great talent of Bob Lamiral, a sturdy youth remarkable alike for his strength of character, power of concentration, and worldly wisdom, lay in his ability to exercise a real influence over the others, and bring about that perfect harmony between them all which made the group invincible. This chief so far in advance of his tender years, this self-centred boy, had a feeling for the occult, patient energy, and a gift for training. A born leader of others, he had self-control also; and foresight, and organizing

ability, and a faculty for appearing entirely carefree. He was able to make a set of thoughtless adolescents pride themselves on never growing vain, never boasting of an exploit, and feeling a profound and indiscriminate contempt for all the other pupils who did not belong to their sect. This rule of silence, a device which had sprung from an exceptional brain, gave the *Malgaches* powers which could be used at their own discretion.

The result of this effective crusade was that within a few months the College was cleansed. Duly made aware of the great dangers to which they would henceforth be exposed, the informers abstained from further activities; and as men, whether young or old, may easily lose one tendency only to acquire its opposite, one observed former sneaks, with a somewhat flabby zeal, being the first to give a warning sign of a master's approach. This state of things lasted for two years. When the sneaks fell back once more into their evil habits, prompt and powerful action proved a sufficient reminder of the necessity for loyalty and the team spirit. Unfortunately, at the end of these two years the leader of the *Malgaches* left the College.

A boy of the stamp of Bob Lamiral is most difficult to replace. At the beginning of the year the *Malgaches* had elected as their leader the tall Souffay. It was a bad choice, which showed a complete lack of judgment as well as base ingratitude to Bob Lamiral who, before leaving, had nominated Noel Cacia as his successor—for want of anyone better, be it said. Thinking only of the amusing, the farcical side of their undertaking, and not of efficiency at all, in preference to him the *Malgaches* had chosen the tall Souffay. He was a frantic individualist, with some natural curiosity, doubtless, but not enough for the post he had to fill. Independent, amusing, helpful, and trustworthy he certainly was; but his capacity for arrangement and organization was small. He was far too much taken up with his own personality, with securing success for his own monkey tricks, to make it possible for him to take any comprehensive view. A leader must be capable of ruthless self-denial, involving contempt for either praise or blame: in Souffay such qualities were completely lacking. To the actual leadership of the group he gave scarcely a thought.

Under the tall Souffay's direction the strict discipline of the *Malgaches* grew slack. As is wont to happen when there is no strong directing mind to watch over and preserve the continuity of a collective effort, this sect lost sight of its former aims and imperceptibly relapsed into a nerveless and weak-kneed anarchy with erotic tendencies; this being the fault of Zinopino, whose physical enterprises held great sway over the boys' minds. In actual fact, for some months past the *Malgaches'* chief preoccupation had been with the thrilling problem of initiation in the mysteries of love.

Zinopino spent his periods of leave with a doctor at Valmonciel, a relation of his. On one of those occasions he brought back some medical engravings, in colour, wherein could be examined in full detail the most intimate recesses of the feminine form. In the margin of each engraving there were reference numbers giving the name of each organ, without, unfortunately, specifying its use—a very awkward omission, leaving the boys without sufficiently precise technical information. These arid diagrams were of little use to them for the purpose of tracing the act of love, which remained for them the mystery of mysteries.

They searched elsewhere and acquired a keen hunger for dictionaries (of an entirely different kind, needless to say, from those which the College allowed). There was keen competition to obtain for one's friends some secret definition, extracted from forbidden bookshelves. These definitions proved to be profoundly discouraging. For example: "*Clitoris. A small erectile organ in the upper portion of the vulva*" left them musing. It gave them no enlightenment whatever. Zinopino alone had some data as the result of personal experience. But he summarized his knowledge in strange formulas. "A woman, when you touch her—it makes you stronger than anything else does. You'd better get a move on, see!" Then he added: "Why don't you have a go, you pack of idiots? For twenty francs that fat Emma would put you right in a jiffy."

The boys were saying to each other that they must settle this matter once for all. Jean-Louis Laguinche and Noel Cacia returned to "The Toboggan," each boy once. What they had done there provided the subject-matter for a great discussion in

the presence of witnesses, each boy flattering himself that he had surpassed the other in daring.

These significant things had happened a short time before Easter. Then came the holidays. The boys went off full of hope, each one anticipating that at last he would find some opportunity of settling once for all the problem with which his mind had been so engrossed. Everything seemed to point to Laguinche and Noel Cacia, who had just taken a great step forward, as likely to be the first to succeed.

On the boys' return at the end of the holidays, one of them immediately announced that his initiation had taken place—and more than once, too. He wished it to be understood that this had been no patched-up affair, but a series of meetings which had gone to great lengths, with a person of great experience and skill, who had herself taken a very lively pleasure (seeing that it had all been freely offered) in this dalliance with a puberty barely complete.

The hero of this story was Galuchon (rhetoric Class A), recently appointed a *Malgache*, than whom no one would have appeared to be less capable of such an exploit. However, the abundance and precision of the details he gave left no room for doubt that he had actually succeeded in the achievement of which he was now boasting. It had, moreover, been accomplished under conditions which were as brilliant and as comfortable as they were flattering to the boy, and aroused the envy of all the others, who had gone off for the holidays with wildly voluptuous hopes and dreams and then returned as they had left, raw and inexperienced and still hampered by their own blushing embarrassment.

This Galuchon had a cousin of twenty-six, a medical student, who regarded sexual questions as being of fundamental importance, going even so far as to say that the changes of puberty (especially where pupils of the Fathers were concerned) left a deep mark on young people, for—so his theory maintained—the troublesome shyness and reticence of that particular age might have hidden and secret effects of an extremely noxious kind, on the mind no less than the body; and that these might be of a

nature sufficiently durable to bring about certain queer manifestations during the years of maturity, and others, more scandalous and repulsive, in old age. The student flattered himself that he was on the way to proving that senile exhibitionism can nearly always be traced back to the suppressions and frustrations of adolescence. (He was thinking of taking this as the subject for the doctor's degree.) From these premises the young therapist, who was greatly taken up with eugenics and the preservation of mental stability, deduced that so soon as they give evidence of virility, no time should be lost in giving boys the solution of the enigma of woman, and that on the whole it was better that they should exhaust themselves in normal excesses than refrain from such exertions in the pale counterfeits in which too many adolescents, thereby fundamentally impoverished, are wont to take delight.

Faithful to his doctrine, and having become very friendly with Galuchon, whose sufferings he understood, this student, whose name was Girard, resolved to do his young cousin a signal service. As he was the lover of a kept woman, a charming and indeed intoxicating person of thirty-four, celebrated for her dashing mastery of the art of love (and who adored rare sensations), he took the youthful Galuchon to see her, the boy being much troubled by his virgin state and now about to throw himself into the arms of a pretty if depraved young woman in much the same way as he would have gone to the dentist.

Girard explained to his fair friend the nature of the service which he expected her experience to render. She agreed without a moment's hesitation, and seemed impatient in her eagerness and joy as she turned round to the schoolboy and cried out: "Oh, the little angel, the little angel! I shall just gobble him up, the little angel!" "My dear Olga," the student said, "take great care of him. He is a young relation of mine." "Come now, darling," this amiable person replied, "when I'm doing it just for the pleasure of it. . . . Have *you* anything to complain of?" "Indeed, I have not," the student said. "You can see now how much I think about you." "My goodness, what a little treasure he is," the fair Olga exclaimed as she looked at Galuchon. "So . . . never . . . ?" "Never," said the student, "I can vouch for

that. You find that exciting, do you, that idea?" "Oh!" she cried, "go away now. Hurry up and leave me with this angel child who's so brand-new!" Since his cousin was supposed to be looking after him, Galuchon had the whole afternoon to himself, and the lovely Olga likewise, as the man who kept her came but seldom to see her, on days fixed in advance.

What followed is beyond description, so voraciously did the beautiful Olga regale herself on her schoolboy. Galuchon was literally assaulted by Venus herself, denuded by her, as she herself gradually disrobed in a chiaroscuro skilfully arranged; he was overwhelmed with tender utterances, with billings and cooings and warblings, with cries of "my little sweet," "my darling," and other of love's endearments; sweet perfumes all but overcame him; he was dizzied by a wealth of smooth and glossy, curved and rounded flesh—a flesh rich in consuming, burning mystery, in delicious nooks and corners, in places with which contact was galvanic; he was absorbed, engulfed—a drowning sweet indeed, but too intense to bear, which drew from him plaintive moans that were echoed by his frenzied partner's deeper cries. In her arms Galuchon felt as though he were melting away to dissolution and death. He was being as it were devoured by this gluttonous but intoxicating creature. From the hour of three until seven p.m. he was cast adrift upon a stormy sea of pleasure and delight which left him, at intervals, stretched out on Olga's wide bed like a shipwrecked sailor regaining consciousness on some unknown shore. Of expert knowledge he had none at all—it was all hers—but with the help of this charming person's skilful management G. uchon displayed some surprising gifts, so much so that his partner freely expressed her admiration, telling him that his behaviour was like that of a real grown-up man (and so far as that was concerned she knew what she was talking about, the hussy!).

From this encounter Galuchon, needless to say, emerged dazed and not a little shaky on his legs, but immensely proud. He was invited to come again two days later, and he was careful not to be late. During the holidays he paid five visits to Olga, each one of them prolonged and of a hectic and tumultuous nature. Within a few days he lost over six pounds in weight and looked

as if he were made of papier mâché. "Goodness gracious!" his mother said to him, "don't you feel well? But you're eating ravenously! I can't make head or tail of you." And, indeed, it was difficult enough for a mother to understand, when nothing certainly could have been further from her mind than the thought of her child taking up the afternoons of a young woman beyond the pale!

It will be readily deduced from the above that Galuchon had returned to Sainte-Colline with a splendid packet of revelations by which his friends could hardly fail to be amazed. The *Malgaches* were soon in a state of complete effervescence. A kept woman, and a wealthy one at that, supplied the subject-matter of their scabrous conversations, which took place in the remotest corners of the playground. They wanted to know every detail of the intoxicating Olga; her physical perfection, her maxims in the art of love, the colour of her hair and eyes, her dresses, her underclothes, her apartment—and a thousand other things that related to the most fascinating of all mysteries. Galuchon spared no pains in lauding her to the skies. But he had no need to stress the matter, for his own tendency to exaggerate was, quite naturally, finding an echo in the minds of his listeners.

It should not be forgotten that Olga was no commonplace creature, that she had nothing in common with the vulgar debauchery of the shoddy houses (of the "Toboggan" class) in which initiations too often take place under the most discouraging conditions. She was a memorable picture of vice incarnate, triumphant in her shamelessness, an outstanding type of the evil woman who turns all men's heads, mentioned only with horror in all right-minded families. She was the great Strumpet, greatly to be feared, the Harlot, weaver of spells, she who, despised and beyond the pale but none the less desired, by the sole means of the fame of that devilish, irrepressible body of hers makes communities tremble, threatens institutions, turns cashiers into thieves, officers into traitors, manufacturers into bankrupts, kings into subjects. She was the lewd huntress of men, the beast of prey of their nights, the goddess of lust, the courtesan who drains men dry of all their wealth and drives them mad. The bestowal of her favours on a boy of sixteen was extremely encouraging to

all other boys of that age. She proved to them that they were no longer mere youngsters, that they should be taken seriously, if not for their appearance, at least for their accomplishments.

The great Zinopino, who was demeaning himself with the lowest of female society, was now relegated to second place, after Galuchon. Dominique Issartier alone remained in a category peculiar to himself, never having ceased to be thought of as the darling of princesses, of lovely exotic young women; and Léone de Vailly-Citot, that strange girl, haughty and capricious, and kept imprisoned by her parents in an old château in the provinces, still occupied his thoughts and his life. But Dominique Issartier had his own way of doing everything, and no one would have dared to compare himself with him. Nevertheless, the great romantic reputation of Léone de Vailly-Citot was overshadowed, from that time onwards, by the eccentric and lascivious splendours of Olga, with her silks, her exquisite perfumes, and her tumultuous, hectic nights.

The boys' imaginations were kindled and aflame with Galuchon's magic friend, and their only dream was to have each one his own Olga. That lovely creature was modelled by each in thought to suit his own peculiar fancy, and there was no source of allurements that she did not thereby acquire. An overwhelming intoxication laid its hold upon them. They began composing "Epistles to Olga," and wrote her letters which they read to each other during the hours of recreation. It was from this mutual rivalry that the scandal arose.

Sister Parfaite was busy putting away the pupils' clothes when she picked up from the floor of the linen-room a little carefully folded note which had without doubt fallen from the pocket of some garment which she had been handling. Sister Parfaite, who had no idea of the strength of amorous hallucinations, was much astonished to read the following:

O divine, O radiant Olga,

Star of my nights, queen of my thoughts,

While that old periwinkle X . . . (here followed some illegible name, probably that of a professor or other master on duty) is looking daggers at us, I am thinking of you, my Indispensable one. I am thinking of your fiery embrace, your kisses, your sighs, your tales of love, O

my adored mistress. I am thinking of your white breasts, I am thinking of the warm shadows of your body, and quicksilver flows through my veins. Ah, if I could but clasp you in my arms, and we could love each other, love each other, while the muezzins cry from one minaret to another, and the red sunsets of the East cast their flaming light over Stamboul the Golden!

Your lover consumed with desire.

To make this lyrical outburst comprehensible, it should be explained that the boys had just read, on the sly, Pierre Loti's *Les Désenchantées*, and that they had been greatly struck by that novel. But Sister Parfaite, who did not read Loti, knew nothing whatever of the mirages of the Orient and the alluring veiled ladies who are to be met with on the site of Byzantium of old. This nun of forty-odd summers, rigidly faithful to her vows, had come to consider—by a pious distortion which accorded with her profession—as nothing less than frightful obscenities everything nearly or remotely connected with love. The manner in which this letter was expressed, suggested to her the language used by the worst of the blackguards in hell. She went off there and then to the Vice-Principal, who was himself quick to discern evidence, in that composition, of an advanced state of depravation. He then went and reported the matter to the Superior, who immediately sent for the prefect of the Senior Division, the Abbé Diot. The latter declared that he did not recognize the handwriting, which was obviously disguised, and that he had not come across anything in his Division which pointed to immorality. It was consequently decided to institute a great search of the pupils' desks, in their absence.

This search resulted in some extremely strange surprises. In thirteen desks the Fathers discovered photographs of nude persons with very plump thighs, magnificent hips, and aggressive bosoms. The smiles of these unchaste ladies were invitations to something quite other than to hear Mass. And—a curious coincidence, this—the Christian name of these persons, though they differed strongly from each other anatomically, was in every case Olga, according, at least, to the name written beneath each photograph.

When the raid was finished, the two Prefects and the Superior

took counsel together in the latter's room. They were exceedingly embarrassed at having to examine, within sight of each other, these abominable photographs; but they had to do it as a matter of duty before proceeding to further investigations. One point struck them particularly. The posterior of each of these Olgas (obligingly reproduced at different angles) was as vast and tempting as the fertile territories so eagerly desired by the poorer nations. The three priests—and especially the Abbé Diot, who had a weak heart—did not escape from this temptation of St Anthony without the beginnings of congestion. But it was all to no purpose. Though viewed from every angle, the different Olgas still kept their secret. The Fathers could not make head or tail of all this and they were undeniably somewhat disturbed. The Superior suggested burning the photographs. But the Abbé Corniol promptly held out his hand.

"Let me have them," he said. "They are exhibits in the case. We may need them."

It was agreed that the matter should not be hurried, and that they should take twenty-four hours to think it over. The Abbé Diot and the Abbé Corniol left the room together and walked in silence to the further end of the corridor. They were just about to separate when the Abbé Diot said, in an offhand sort of manner:

"By the way, do you want to keep them all . . . those photographs?"

"Do you want a few of them?" the Abbé Corniol asked.

"Oh, two or three!" said the Abbé Diot. "Just in case you should lose them, these bits of evidence. There's a strong-looking dark-haired one . . . she seems to me to be the most Olgarish of the whole lot!"

"Take your choice, then," said the Abbé Corniol.

"Ah, there she is!" the Abbé Diot said. "It's a curious thing, she is just like a penitent I used to have, someone who used to confess to me once. A good, pious woman she was too. A *very* good woman she was, I can assure you!"

"You have never heard confessions in the b . . . s, I suppose?"

The Abbé Corniol had let the word slip out in all its crudity.

"Oh, oh, oh," the Abbé Diot replied, with a great burst of laughter, "never, never! But still . . ."

"You regret it?"

"Well, well," said the Abbé Diot, who did not want to appear in any way behindhand, "I must say, and I'm sure you'll agree with me, that to bring a fine great out-and-out harlot back to God is a very different matter from just flicking the dust off the puny souls of our little vestry hangers-on!"

Should the culprits be questioned, or would it be better to say nothing? Should the scandal be made still more of a reality, or should it be suppressed? Thirteen guilty boys was a large number, and all of them were due to take the examination for their bachelor's degrees at the end of the year. There could be no question of giving them some severe collective punishment. Perhaps one of them might be sacrificed, made an example. . . . Among the thirteen boys was a certain Lubperlut, who had no chance of succeeding in the examination. The Superior sent for him, but it was forty-eight hours after the search in the desks. The culprits had utilized this interval for preparation of their defence, each in his own way.

The reader may be assured that Lubperlut felt no great anxiety. Before leaving the classroom he winked at his friends, and as he walked briskly along the corridors he was softly whistling. He appeared to be quite sure of himself and not much disturbed by this summons. However, he managed to look suitably repentant as he entered the Superior's room.

"Tell me, Lubperlut," the Abbé Fuche asked him in his most freezing manner, that manner which was so much feared, "who is this person?"

He held out one of the photographs, that which had been found in Lubperlut's desk. The boy did not move an eyelid.

"Father," he said, in a frank and open manner, "she's a vile creature."

"And how did this photograph come to be stuck in your catechism?"

"Father," Lubperlut said, "it's a long story."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Abbé Fuche. "I should like to hear it."

"I can't tell you," Luberlut replied, seemingly overwhelmed. "It's a family secret."

"Oh, very well, then!" said the Abbé Fuche. "So your family knows all about it. In that case they will not be surprised when they see you back again to-morrow. You will be completing your studies in an institution where family secrets are allowed."

As though stricken with terror, Luberlut cried out:

"Have mercy, Father! Pity my poor mother!"

He had taken out his handkerchief and was sobbing.

"Your mother?" the Abbé Fuche asked, in great astonishment.

"I shall have to tell her everything," Luberlut stammered out.

"And she may do something dreadful."

"Explain yourself," said the Superior.

Luberlut then made a show of overcoming his repugnance, and making up his mind to tell the whole story.

"This person," he said, "is a servant we used to have at home . . . at home . . . and my father . . . my father . . ."

"Well?"

"Used to sleep with her!" said Luberlut, crushed beneath the weight of the paternal infamy.

And his sobs broke out afresh, with renewed vigour. The Abbé Fuche, very surprised, said nothing for some moments. It would certainly not be very charitable to upset a Christian family with revelations like this. Then he asked:

"But tell me, how did you get this photograph? Have you seen this person again?"

"She follows me about," Luberlut answered. "I come across her out of doors, in the holidays. It's my father that she's running after. But I think she wants to make use of me."

"Is her name Olga?"

"No," said Luberlut. "Her real name is Louise Biquet. Olga is the name we all use for women who lead immoral lives."

"And why were you keeping this photograph?"

"It was so as to give myself," Luberlut said, in the sorrowful tone of those who are misunderstood, "a horror of all such creatures, by always being reminded of the person who nearly wrecked my mother's life."

"Very well, then," said the Superior, "I will think the whole matter over."

No sooner had he got out of the room than Luberlut shed his air of contrition altogether, put his handkerchief away, and walked back to the classroom with a step which suggested that some stirring march tune was being played. He was feeling proud, and brisk and merry too. His little story seemed to have gone down splendidly. And after all, the Superior wasn't going to question his father, and as for finding that Biquet girl—they could jolly well look for her!

The very unexpected result of this first examination was a warning to the Superior that prudence should be the order of the day. He did not feel in the least inclined to hear other revelations of the kind which Luberlut had just made to him. On the following Sunday, at High Mass, he preached an important sermon on the subject of purity, in which he laid particular stress on the severity of the punishments which threaten the impure, and threaten them even here on earth, making them besotted and brutish before their time and thereby unfit for honourable tasks. He averred that no great gifts either intellectual or spiritual are unaccompanied by chastity. He even insinuated, in parenthesis, that failure to obtain the bachelor's degree would be the first of the punishments for debauchery, always supposing that young people could be sufficiently corrupt to allow their thoughts to dwell upon the imagery of lust. This was a neat way of informing the admirers of the Olgas of this world that their goings-on had been discovered (of which they were well aware), and that they were being closely watched (of which they had no doubt). But this sermon had the disadvantage of disclosing to the whole College the fact that something serious had happened, something shady, relating to what they were accustomed to speak of, with lowered voices and a little shiver of horror and curiosity combined, as "smutty tricks." It was a starting-point for conjectures, and these made rapid headway. But the *Malgaches* had the wisdom to refrain from confiding in anyone, with the result that the gossips were discouraged and the hoped-for scandal petered out.

So far as the Abbé Fuche was concerned, there was now a fresh incident, of a much more secret nature, and involving a possibility

of far wider repercussions, which came and diverted his attention from this affair.

It was nine o'clock in the evening. The dormitories were wrapped in slumber, and the Fathers had retired to their rooms, either for work, or for prayer, or to begin their night's rest. The Abbé Fuche, who always went late to bed, was bending over some papers, pen in hand, and dealing with questions relating to the administration of the College. There was a knock at the door, tense and nervous.

The Abbé Marededieu appeared, grimmer and more sinister than ever, and looking strangely bewildered and lost. The Superior could not find a word to say. The Abbé Marededieu then spoke and said, without preamble of any kind:

"I am at the end of my tether. Look, read this."

"What is it all about?"

"Read it!" the Abbé Marededieu said once more. "I hardly know myself."

He retired there and then, having laid a heavy parcel on the Superior's table. It was a very bulky manuscript, entirely in the handwriting of the professor of philosophy. He gave it a cursory glance, and then, suddenly, it riveted his attention. He put his own papers aside and plunged into a deep perusal of the text. And this is what he read:

"A PRIEST'S CONFESSION

"Prefatory Remarks

"These pages were written by a priest in the solitude of a cell, a solitude filled with fiery ardour and deep despair. In that cell he often rolled upon the floor, imploring God to sustain him, beseeching Him to drive away obsessions which gave him nights that could only be compared with the tortures of hell.

"This confession would be pointless if it were only a statement, drawn up in view of a fundamental ordinance of the Church, of an isolated case of a man who found himself unable to abide by promises which he was pledged to fulfil. But I myself, with full

knowledge of what I have endured, of secrets with which I have been entrusted, of what I have observed, of what I have discovered after much scrupulous and patient research, am convinced that I am presenting the case of the Catholic priest in general, as affected by the rule of celibacy.

"Whoever, therefore, reads this, may he do so with an open mind. May he do so with full réalization that I make no statement in these pages of which I am unable to furnish proof—proof, moreover, contained in the most authentic documents of the past. This I declare on my honour as a priest, and by the sincerity of my faith which remains intact, though the condition to which I have referred, and which is imposed on all of us who are priests, seems to me as unjust as it is intolerable. It appears to me to be proved that this condition is contrary to the teaching of the Apostles and of the early Fathers of the Church, and contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

"I ask that this be read coolly and dispassionately, and that those in authority may have pity on us. It is to be hoped that Rome will give consideration to this work of a humble priest, who is speaking in the name of his fellow priests. It is to be hoped that at last our lot may be one that is compatible with our earthly condition. 'Any measure which would eliminate hypocrisy and do away with discomfort would be a relief to us. And I am prepared to maintain that it would be more dignified for the clergy of all ranks.

"THE STORY OF A PRIEST

"A country dweller of humble origin, whose upbringing was blessed by the advice and kind recommendations of some charitable people, to such an extent that I was destined subsequently to rise above my station, after leaving the religious colleges where I had received my instruction almost free of charge I went straight to a seminary. It seemed to me, as it did also to my family, that I was thereby discharging a debt, the debt of gratitude which I owed to my benefactors who, by enabling me to receive a thorough education, were saving me from the very poor cir-

cumstances which in the ordinary way would have been my destiny.

"This interest taken in myself was considered by my parents as a great honour which they themselves shared. That feeling was accompanied in my father's case by a good deal of pride, for he much admired the power of the Church as seen in the fact that in our small town the local curé was received in the best families, in houses where, as a tradesman, he himself penetrated no farther than the servants' quarters. Furthermore, I was the eldest of six children. When I entered the seminary I was the first to be provided for, and was in a position which enabled me to help the careers of my younger brothers; for my father, sharing a conviction very widespread in our part of the country, believed that a bright and prosperous future was assured to the members of a family enjoying 'the support of the curés.' This small piece of scheming was very excusable in the case of a man who, at the time when my own career was being settled, had not yet got clear of all his troubles, though he had already worked extremely hard to bring up his children: it was, moreover, consistent with his beliefs. As for my mother, a very pious woman, she considered this vocation of mine as a gift from heaven, a gift which could not fail to bless, to a very great extent, the whole of her family: I was about to sanctify our home. She did everything she could to encourage me on these lines, as though my priesthood must simultaneously ensure the eternal salvation of my brothers and sisters, my father's, and her own.

"And what could I know at that age?—someone may ask—what could I foresee? I was a studious boy, with delicate health, very piously brought up, and given great encouragement. Everything was mapped out for me, and my way made easy. I had only to prepare myself for the enjoyment of that enviable privilege which had fallen to my lot—my sacred mission—to give satisfaction to everybody. Urged on by my family, my patrons, and my masters; having as yet no inkling of anything in myself that would be in conflict with the proposal; and rather proud of the fact that I should be setting a good example, I went to the seminary.

“THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF THE SEMINARY

“From now henceforth I have no fear in asserting that the moulding and education of the seminary are based on certain misunderstandings and fraud.

“Misunderstandings indeed there are; for you get a number of ignorant adolescents, who will soon themselves be grown men, left without the least enlightenment as to a man’s physiological make-up, what his functions are and the impetuous nature of those functions. These boys are supposed merely to ignore them; and if their sufferings are too painful, they are given to understand that these are just a passing phase, an ordeal, and that there is a special dispensation of Providence by which ecclesiastics are enabled to treat all carnal desire with the contempt which is its due. These matters, moreover, are never spoken of except with extreme embarrassment, which makes it impossible for any clear explanation to be given. The result is that each boy is liable to believe that his own temptation is exceptional, doubtless because of his unworthiness; and a sense of shame stops him from trying to sift and examine his own case while there would still be time for him to do so.

“Fraud there is too; for the seminarist is not allowed to know the true history of dogma, the true history of the Popes, the true history of the occasions of the Church’s collusion, during the centuries of her existence, with the different secular authorities.

“I maintain that underlying this teaching there is lack of honesty, a survival of the old spirit of obscurantism, and some baseness too, for the procedure is such that the priest’s calling is not chosen with full knowledge of the circumstances, but is decided by methods which are of no credit to anyone. These methods are disparaging to an extremely worthy and highly meritorious clergy, and the Church behaves as though the groundwork of faith were tarnished by unnameable vice. (I believe that the real origin of the mischief is to be found in teachers who have been far too enterprising, and have tried to prove too much.)

"THE DANGER OF CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS

"The folly and the danger of this system lie in the fact that it renders the priest liable to a terrible moral shock when, wishing to trace his faith back to its origin, he discovers so many inaccuracies and so much that is suppressed. From that time onwards there will be a tragic element in his life, which will be subject to obsessions that may pervert his instincts and becloud his brain. What choice is then left to us?

"Either, first, complete conformity with the rule of continence. But for this, exceptional physiological characteristics are required (which among laymen would be regarded as defects, and which usually have some pathological origin). For a strict observance of this law, a priest should be sexually deficient; but it is a recognized fact that such deficiency is not seen in isolation, but is accompanied by other deficiencies, among the most important of which intellectual inferiority is often found.

"The other alternative is outward conformity with the law of ecclesiastical celibacy, while not remaining chaste, and falling into secret concubinage, or having recourse to the degraded service of prostitution. To maintain that a minister of God was exalted by contacts such as these would be hardly possible, though they are the least disastrous so far as the social order is concerned, for they eliminate the danger of priests running after other men's wives, as happened in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a danger so great and so widespread that husbands were anxious to see, in control of churches, only such priests as were provided with concubines. (Gerson. *De vita spiritualis animae*: "It is certainly a great scandal for his parishioners to see a curé living with a concubine. But the scandal would be far greater if the curé sinned with his female parishioners.)

"Absolute chastity is an intolerable condition, and it is moreover dangerous for the normal man. Now a priest is a man, and it is a man who, clad in his priest's garments, is here and now crying aloud in his profound moral distress. As his readers may well believe, his reluctance and hesitation were great, his struggles severe, before he finally resolved to make this public confession

of his unhappiness. And even now he would probably have remained silent, had his own case stood alone. But he is a symbol of thousands upon thousands of other priests whose minds and faith are tottering because certain demands are made on them which are inhuman.

"There comes a time in a priest's life when he realizes that he has been mistaken about himself, that he has been under an illusion as regards his capacity for observing strict continence and remaining in solitude. It is thus that, when he has already reached full maturity, he is led to ask himself some momentous questions. These questions may impel him to go in for a course of research. That is precisely what has happened to the writer of these pages.

"When it is remembered that this priest had had no rule of life other than the teachings of the seminary, it will be easy enough to understand, first his astonishment, then his doubts, then his despair when, as he progressed in his researches, he discovered an important aspect of religious history that had been withheld from him. An ecclesiastic who has suffered horribly for fifteen or twenty years past gets a sudden impression of having been abominably deceived when he discovers that the rules of chastity and solitude, which have been the greatest torments of his life, are quite recent institutions, and that during the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era the clergy were never subject to them. For fifteen centuries the clergy lived in the married state (and in notorious concubinage when the right to marry was refused them). The Popes and the bishops set the example. Was the Church so much the worse for it?

"He who, having long been pining away in fearful solitude, sets out to discover the reason for this complete change will fail to find it. The life of a priest is an infinitely sad one, for he cannot hold his head high without hypocrisy; he cannot carry out the duties of his priesthood without blushing at the thoughts which sometimes come to him. These men, chosen to bring to their fellow creatures a message of hope and of happiness to come, bear no peace within themselves."

The Abbé Fuche interrupted his reading in order to ponder about these things, on which he had often meditated in earlier

days. In actual fact this question of continence concerned him less than other people, for he had suffered but little in that respect, having a somewhat chilly temperament, with little or no inclination for sensual pleasure. It may even have been an intuitive perception of this coldness, when a very young man, that had directed him to the ecclesiastical life. He had often wondered about this, before he reached the age of forty. He felt certain that there had been a period of mysticism before he went to the seminary. Nevertheless, the decision to go there had not been made until the test of reason had been applied to it. Doubtless what had been the actual thoughts passing through the mind of an adolescent was becoming vague and troublesome to define after the lapse of so many years. Still, the Abbé Fuche's impression was that the love of God had not been the determining cause in this matter. The question he had asked himself in former days was rather this—whether the love of God, considered from the point of view of one's career, was a safer and more profitable investment than this or that form of secular occupation. He had chosen the ecclesiastical career because that solution of his problem seemed to be the most advantageous in his own case. From the age of sixteen onwards, a sure instinct had warned André-Marie Melchior Fuche that such successes as the world might have in store for him would be attained only in austere and rigid circumstances, devoid of affection and love, and that he would never be made much use of. His merits would be of a dull and arid nature, and his successes won only at the cost of steady work. His intelligence, which was keen but lacking in warmth, always needed to base itself on scholasticism; in the same way that the lack of attractiveness in his personal appearance restrained him from any attempt at domination so long as he was unsupported by some authority which no one could challenge. But he had ambition, and a fondness for a certain cold and mysterious impressiveness of manner, with a tendency to base his authority on a strictness and rigidity of method for which he felt himself more suited than the great majority of people. These useful qualities he would find assembled in the Church, where his own prestige would be mingled with that of God Himself.

In the ecclesiastical life the Abbé Fuche had worked without

sparing himself, but there had been no love nor any real joy in all his efforts. His mind was constantly invaded by qualms and doubts. He felt that he had taken the line of least resistance and at small cost to himself, that he had fled from the world at large, where his work would have been rougher and more dangerous, and he asked himself whether it was fair that he should be in enjoyment of unfailing safety and security when he was giving so little in return. In ecstasy and prayer he behaved like a woman who is cold in love. He never reached the supreme moment, the moment of realization, that joy and delight, that illumination of heart and mind by which the blessed saints have been enraptured. He did not feel conscious of God, whom he reproached himself for having chosen as a precaution, and who was now punishing him for it. He suffered from appalling barrenness. That was his torment.

His only means of escape from all this was his ceaseless devotion to the manifold duties of his post. But he was like an incurable, his mind never entirely taken off his disease. His icy austerity, which he imposed on the whole College, was deeply rooted in a heart that was tortured by remorse and doubt. The Abbé Fuché reproached himself for caring about nothing in the religious life except the command which he exercised over a community of three hundred souls. Sometimes he told himself that he was doing useful work, and that he was placed exactly where he could best serve others. But he added, in these soliloquies, that he was ruined by pride, that he was neither truly charitable nor truly humble, that his heart and mind were lukewarm and insensitive. The sight of the gentle Father Bricole made him quiver with envy, that man, that mender, *he* knew how to love, that ignoramus received messages direct from God Himself!

As in the case of all beings who suffer, so did the Abbé Fuché come to believe that no one else could suffer so intensely as he. And similarly, as in the case of all beings who suffer, the confession of someone else's suffering aroused his curiosity vividly. He returned to the manuscript.

Attached to the Abbé Marededieu's confession was an important file of classified and annotated sheets in which quotations and references were set out for the reader's benefit. The arrange-

ment of this file gave evidence of long-drawn-out and careful work and unfailing erudition. Mentioned therein were the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St Paul including the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the writings of Clement of Alexandria, of Tertullian of Carthage, of Origen, of St Basil of Caesarea, the *Philosophumena* of St Hippolytus, the *Office of a Priest* of St Ambrose, the *Confession* of St Patrick, the *Book of the Sufferings of the Church* by Otto, Bishop of Verceil, the *Itinerarium* of Ratier of Verona, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* of St Method, the *Acta sincera* of Ruinart, the *De gloria confessorum* of St Gregory of Tours, the *Liber apologeticus* of St Bonaventura, the *Chronica* of St Anthony, the *De corrupto ecclesiae statu* of Nicholas of Clamengis, and the *Gallia christiana*, the *Liber gomorrhianus*, the *Liber gratissimus*, the *Acta sanctorum*, the *History of the Inquisition*, the chronicles of the monk Burton, the *Revelations* of St Bridget, etc., etc. There were comments on the quotations, which themselves were used in confirmation of what the Abbé Maredieu had written elsewhere. The Abbé Fuchs, whose knowledge of these questions was very limited, read the following passages with astonishment.

“THE EARLIEST TEACHING

“There is no question of virginity and celibacy in either St Paul or the first of the evangelists, Mark and Luke. St Matthew makes the first allusion to the question, in this form: ‘And there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.’

“There are some comments to be made on this subject.

“Voluntary castration was a rite of pagan origin, very prevalent in certain Greek and oriental mysteries. This practice gave rise to such abuses that it was forbidden in several imperial edicts, before its prohibition by the councils.

“There were two heresies in the second century, Marcionism and Montanism, which preached a doctrine of complete asceticism and proscribed marriage. Although these heresies were

condemned, they held some sway down to the fourth century, and they contaminated Christian doctrine.

"The early literature of Christianity, which was very scanty, was constantly altered and rearranged down to the end of the second century. New writings, which themselves also have been revised, were subsequently added to it, such as the Gospels of St Matthew and St John and the Apocalypse. It is therefore not surprising to find these later writings influenced to some extent by Montanism, as, for example, when in the Apocalypse marriage is referred to as 'a defilement.'

"ECCLESIASTICAL MARRIAGE

"It appears to be certain that some Apostles were married. In any case, from the opening of the third century onwards, one begins to see, among the clergy, bishops, priests, and deacons married, and even polygamous. (Polygamy had doubtless not been abolished among the laity.) Here are some examples of married priests: Cecilian of Carthage (who converted St Cyprian about the year 247): Novat of Carthage (who, it appears, gave his wife a miscarriage after he had kicked her in the stomach). Examples of married bishops: Cheremon, Bishop of Nilus (249-251): Saint Spiridion, Bishop of Trimithus, Cyprus (who is supposed to have restored his daughter to life to find out from her where a treasure was hidden); Saint Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis in Egypt.

"We may now mention a family all of whom were saints: St Gregory of Nazianza (Cappadocia), the first of the name, whose wife was St Nonna, by whom he had a daughter, St Gorgonia, and two sons, St Caesarius and St Gregory of Nazianza, known as the Theologian, the second of the name, who ended his career as Bishop of Constantinople.

"From that time onwards marriage was in the ascendant, despite the champions of celibacy. Under Charlemagne the 'sons of priests' was an expression commonly used.

"THE POPES AND CELIBACY

"Between 891 and 999, thirty-two Popes successively occupied the throne of St Peter, whom J. de Maistre himself refers to as 'monsters of villainy and licentiousness.' Under Sergius III (905-912), John X (914-928), and John XI (931-936), three women ruled the Papacy: Theodora the mother, and her two daughters, Theodora and Marozia. Marozia was the mistress of Sergius III. Theodora the daughter was the mistress of John X. John XI was the son of Marozia and Sergius III. And Theodora the mother, was herself the daughter of Pope Innocent VIII.

"Here is some more information regarding a few of the Popes, without considering them all. Boniface VIII, whose case was investigated after his death, was found guilty of fornication, paederasty, and sodomy. John XXII took money from priests with concubines, and sold the priestly offices. John XXIII (elected Pope in 1410) was a former Sicilian pirate. As cardinal, he conquered Bologna on behalf of Boniface IX, and there he seduced two hundred women. He was brought to trial and deposed by the Council of Constance, which found him guilty of fornication with his brother's wife, with nuns, with young girls and married women. Paul II 'filled the pontifical palace with his concubines.' One need hardly mention the famous Borgia, Alexander VI, who had two wives and six children during his cardinalate and a seventh child after he had become Pope. Jules II had three daughters and suffered from syphilis. Paul III is known to have had four illegitimate children. John XII was knocked on the head by an enraged husband and died soon afterwards, etc., etc."

A strange noise was heard, and the Abbé Fuche gave a sudden start. A kind of sneering chuckle, wild and long-drawn-out, had just disturbed the deep silence of the night. The Superior rose and went to the window, where he drew the curtain slightly aside. A few yards away from his room, on the same floor of the building, he saw a pale, diffused light which made a rift in the surrounding gloom. He concluded that the Abbé Marededieu was

also sitting up late, battling to suppress the immaterial visions of his carnal desire. It occurred to him that this priest, whose grim and sullen pride he knew so well, must indeed have suffered greatly to have given him these intense and deeply felt confessions to read. He realized that his own rather tragic situation was not the only one in the College, and perhaps not the most poignant. He thought of all these different priests' rooms, where other men too were living in solitude, deprived of all tenderness and gentle care, who doubtless also were striving and sweating in anguish. But what could he do for them? And what could they do themselves, those men, a prey to their nocturnal torments? He made a gesture of despair, and murmured "God, have pity on us!" He went back to his table, put an old wadded garment round his shoulders, for he was feeling the cold of those midnight hours, and resumed his reading of the manuscript.

"MORALS OF THE LESSER CLERGY"

"These are no less extreme than the examples provided by Rome. Twenty years after the death of Gregory VII, concubinage is universal in Normandy. The priests leave their churches as an inheritance to their sons or as a dowry for their daughters. The doctors of the period (all of them priests or monks) are saying that fornication is necessary for the health. A Benedictine of the Order of Cluny, writing about the monks of the Order of St Anthony, makes this statement: 'The whole countryside is peopled with their children.' In Paris, 'the clergy are more dissolute than the rest of the people.' St Bonaventura writes that 'the assistant priests were so given to vice that a respectable woman was afraid of being dishonoured if she should converse with them in private.' These abuses were to last in France until about the end of the sixteenth century, despite pontifical or other decrees

"THE COUNCILS"

"In the Councils of Pavia (1020), Arras (1025), and Bourges (1031) married bishops are conspicuous. The Councils of

Mayence (1049), and Rome (1050 and 1059) protest against the marriage of priests. The Councils of Rome (1074), presided over by Gregory VII, of Erfurt (1074) of Rome (1075), of Lisbon (1080) still proscribe marriage, but to no purpose, as is seen in the fact that the Lateran Council (1215) 'forbids the sons of Canons to become Canons in the same church as their father, especially if they are bastards.'

"Lastly, while the Lateran Council in 1525, summoned in order to fight against the growing influence of Luther, was to make a final and conclusive declaration of the superiority of ecclesiastical celibacy, the question was really decided by heresy. Marriage was still retained as their prerogative by Protestant ministers. But nearly a century had yet to pass before the old customs disappeared, and the French clergy made a show of obedience to the orders given by the Church.

"On the other hand, the Council of Nice, in 325, had condemned the celibacy of priests. They were advised to marry, by old canons known under the designations of 'Canons of St Hippolytus,' 'Apostolic canons,' 'Apostolic Constitutions,' which were held in great honour in the fourth and fifth centuries. Here are some notable extracts: 'No celibate may be ordained.' 'Marriage is not a defilement.' 'As regards the man who has abstained from marriage through aversion, forgetting that all things which God has made are very good, and that He has made mankind male and female—if this man has thus blamed creation and been guilty of such blasphemy, let him make amends or be expelled from the Church.' Regarding priests: 'If they entered the clergy before their marriage, we shall allow them to take wives, if they be so inclined, for fear of an offence which would necessitate their punishment.'"

As soon as he had finished reading these abundant and very detailed notes, the Abbé Fuche resumed his reading of the text. It concluded with these words:

"What is needed is a frank and honest and final decision on the question whether priests are or are not like other men. If the answer is 'No,' if it is believed that the act of taking Orders brings them a soothing freedom from all sexual desire, then their

observance of the law of continence confers no merit upon them. One wonders why, if this be so, ecclesiastical celibacy has been the subject of discussion at so many Councils and of fifteen centuries of stormy controversy in the Church

"If the answer is 'Yes,' if it is admitted that priests are subject like other men to the laws of Nature, is it honest to impose laws on them that are contrary to Nature and expect them to observe these? The principal law of Nature, the most powerful of them all, is admirably defined in these words which appear in the 'Apostolic Canons': 'God made man male and female.' This law implies that every human being bears within himself two sexes, his own, and a second one which is but vaguely outlined and barely realized, and is complementary to his own, so that every human being, even in the most complete isolation, aspires to a meeting and fusion of these two sexes. The normal individual is ceaselessly haunted by what we may call the sexual imperative, and it is undoubtedly through the gratifications which this commanding instinct procures for him that he reaches full consciousness of himself as a complete whole. The only alternatives to this fundamental need, which was so designed by the Creator, are lies, outward deceptions, and pernicious deviations from normal instinct.

"If all this be so, would it be wished that this inevitable consummation—for it is stronger than death, with which it has been in conflict since time began—should take place in the form of a fruitful love which can be spoken of without shame, or would it be preferred that it should be enacted in furtive, trivial, degrading ways which cannot be confessed? The majority of priests are crying aloud for some normal regulation which would save them from embarrassment and suspicion."

The College clock had struck three a good while ago, but how much time had elapsed since then the Superior would have had no notion. Sitting with the Abbé Maredieu's manuscript, now closed, on the table before him, tired and chilly, but incapable of getting up and preparing for sleep, he pondered on the strangeness of the lives of these priests, who had sought refuge in religion, but had by no means been spared from affliction and

pain. God succoureth not His own! These men had certainly believed in days gone by that it would be a difficult road on which they were setting out, but that in exchange for things which they would be compelled to forgo, compensations would be granted to them. They had believed that in sacrificing life's pleasures they were heading for joy, an austere, a solemn joy, but enlightening and supreme. And now there was nothing, nothing! Around them there was this silence; within them, these fears, these terrors, these doubts. . . . Despite all those prayers, what a lack of inner response, what barrenness of heart and mind there was, so often!

So deeply plunged in his reverie was he that the Abbé Fuche did not hear a knock at his door. An apparition in black, and of deathly pallor, came abruptly into view. The Abbé Marededieu explained his presence thus:

"I saw a light, so I came in. Have you read it?"

"Yes," said the Abbé Fuche, "I have read it."

"What do you think about it?"

"That there is nothing I can do for you," said the Superior. "Your case is not for me to judge, it is not within my province. No, really, I can do nothing. You should consult someone more highly placed than I am, the Archbishop, for instance. Would you like me to arrange an interview with him?"

"Anything, it doesn't matter what," said the Abbé Marededieu. "I cannot stay as I am any longer."

"I suppose, Father, you are not by chance intending to publish what you have written here? You don't wish to make a scandal?"

"Always that fear of scandal, that fear of the truth!" the Abbé Marededieu cried out. "Anything would be better than this life of baseness and hypocrisy. There is nothing I wouldn't do to get out of it! No, nothing, nothing!"

"I have your work here. It is interesting, and I have found in it much that I did not know myself, things which certainly do look disturbing. But I have thought the matter over, and have come to the conclusion that your arguments are misleading, as, for example, those relating to the education and training of the

seminary. You must remember that for the upholding of certain truths, exceptionally sound and well-balanced minds are required. Our country curés, who form the great majority, have no need to be acquainted with all the discussions which have preceded the proper focusing of points of dogma, nor the occasions on which dignitaries of the Church have been at loggerheads with one another. Such knowledge could only unsettle and perplex those worthy folk. Dogma is exactly on a par with commands given to the soldier; one may not question it. And the non-commissioned officers have nothing to do with strategy. The Church, who sets out to guide and direct men, has chosen her own means for doing so. To my mind she has done this well. Submission to discipline renders better service than intelligence. A spirit of fanaticism is better than the philosophical spirit, which has always had a disintegrating effect, as history shows. What you have discovered in your researches has been known to other and by no means unimportant people. If they have allowed certain events of bygone days to become shrouded in a veil of silence, you may be quite sure that they have had good reasons for doing so."

Monseigneur Bourdingue had spoken with vivacity, and was already making a gesture of dismissal, implying thereby that he felt that no good purpose would be served in returning to questions which the Councils had settled long ago. However, the sinister appearance and general bearing of the Abbé Marcedieu made him change his mind, and he continued thus.

"The flesh is weak, Father, so it is written. We are told that the righteous man will be tempted, tortured, and that sometimes he will succumb. Give way as little as you possibly can—that is the advice that is now given to you. And if you do have to yield, do it in such a way that no scandal shall come of it, that is what I ask of you. But do not attach any exaggerated importance to your deeds of shame. Above all, don't be vain enough to think that your case is any different from a hundred thousand others like it. The Church orders you to be celibate, so that's that. As for continence, that is a matter for every man to settle for himself, and we have all, we ecclesiastics, been through the crisis which you are now enduring. So do the best you can, like thousands of

others before you, without making much ado about it. Sin, if sin you must, but let there be neither pride nor arrogance in it. I understand that certain of our Fathers know some discreet, unobtrusive places where there is no fear of any indiscretions, nor of being seen. That is better than following in the footsteps of Luther. So I say once more, do what you can, if that ravaging beast within you has really to be satisfied. God knows your needs and your struggles and your anguish. He will be your judge in those matters. But don't imagine that there is a single rule of the Church which could ever be unsettled or disturbed merely because it happens to cause you suffering."

"Must I then, because I am a man, put off this dress and lose my faith!" the Abbé Maredieu exclaimed, while his distracted features reflected the tiniest fluctuations of a tragic mental struggle.

"Who said anything of the kind! Faith has nothing to do with our weaknesses. You attach too much importance to the body, which is destined to fall into decay. Leave it to its own shame. It is enough that your mind should belong to God and your intelligence to the Church. Your body is Job's dunghill, and on that dunghill you should praise God. The more the body is debased, the more should its debasements help us to uplift our minds."

A brief and terrible burst of the Abbé Maredieu's sneering laughter was heard. He replied:

"Uplift the mind while fornicating like a pig!"

"I am not asking you about that, Father! But anyhow, what is it that you want?"

"I want the impure man that I am to cease being regarded as a saintly one. I want to rid myself of hypocrisy and to be given the means of doing so."

"Do not count on that. And moreover, have you ever asked yourself whether hypocrisy is not the most subtle of the Church's rules, that which has proved to be the best adapted to the checking of the passions and the humbling of pride? No great and widespread dominion is conceivable without tyranny. This tyranny of appearances to which we have to submit—while leaving us free to ignore it in case of need, so long as the principle

itself is not endangered—this tyranny that hampers and puts a brake on our guilty undertakings, do you not see in it a masterpiece of profound and infinitely wise policy? Just consider it, and you will find that it is one of those devices of the Church that are the most worthy of admiration. It makes us ecclesiastics beings apart, and the feeling of uncertainty which the laity have about us gives us a prestige which is not at all likely to vanish.”

“A prestige which nine times out of ten is based on odious lies. In my opinion these lies are a profanation of the true teaching of Christ.”

“That teaching, Father, is one thing, and its interpretation and application are another. The Church’s mission is to administer the word of God. She doesn’t do it so badly. What is it, actually, that you want? That priests should be authorized to take wives, perhaps.”

“Yes,” the Abbé Maredieu replied. “It would be cleaner, more honest, and more dignified.”

Monseigneur Bourdingue leaned back in his armchair and gazed steadily at the abbé with his small, piercing eyes, in which there could be seen a gleam of ironical and slightly contemptuous pity. He seemed to be meditating, to be rearranging his ideas. At last he spoke:

“You will be crushed, my friend,” he said, calmly. “Rome will never abolish a law which unquestionably renders good service. Celibacy makes us the janissaries of the Church. Don’t imagine that you will be allowed to become an ordinary lower middle-class citizen with his petty little material worries, worries about his family’s future: that you will be allowed to become a husband who will tell his wife everything in bed, including the secrets of the confessional. You moan and lament, but what do you really know? Millions of laymen the world over are being overcome by horror and disgust in marriage. Is it their lot that you are envying? Are you wanting, like them, to be absorbed, swallowed up by the weaknesses, the exactions—the fertility of a woman? You have God, with the virile discipline He requires you to observe, and your aim and ideal is to place yourself at the mercy of the clinging female of our species? Do you *really* need

the perspiration of her couch, the varied odours of her body, the base flattery with which assuagement inspires her? I pity you, Father, if you have come to that!"

The Abbé Marededieu had blushed at these insulting words. But he answered nothing. It was evident that he was still holding out. Monseigneur Bourdinguc adopted a change of manner as he continued thus:

"Come, come, Father, the Apocalypse is not so far wrong in calling marriage a defilement. Everything is symbolical in the Scriptures. Woman, far more than man, is but mire and corruption, the haunt of the unclean. Her body is the abyss in which all spirituality is swallowed up, in which all strength disintegrates. Woman will be for ever the implement of our debasements and our falls. He who adores that being will always be accursed. Come now, Father, the Church may be rigid and strict, but she is a good mother, and to protect us in our blunders and follies she has erected the barriers of an experience which has ripened through long centuries of time. By forbidding us daily intercourse with women, she has given us a liberty of immense value. I know that in days past there were married priests, but those ecclesiastical families were a sordid riff-raff of small shopkeepers of the presbytery and the altar. As you yourself have written, those people obtained their inheritances through the sacraments; they feathered their nests from pious offerings. And why? Because there were women at the presbyteries, despots at night and harpies by day! Just think, Father. Can you see them married, those poor curés in our hamlets and villages and small towns? They would be marrying girls working on the farms and waitresses in cafés. The Church would be governed by vain young women with no brains, plain ones suffering from jealousy, and kitchenmaids. Gossips would be giving away the secrets of conscience-stricken penitents, and young hussies would take a hand in settling matters relating to eternal salvation. The Church would be involving herself in silly tittle-tattle, conspiracies hatched in kitchens, and the extreme intimacies of conjugal life. Go and visit your women if you feel you must. Go as you would to a restaurant or a hotel, but bear always in mind that women will never come to us except as penitents. At the moment when

they reach the doors of our sanctuaries their reign is over; and that is as it should be. Do you understand?"

But the Abbé Marededieu still refused to be convinced. He replied:

"All this does not alter the fact that God has made woman to be the companion of man!"

"Of the ordinary man. A priest is not an ordinary man."

The interview continued on these lines. No explicit agreement was arrived at as its result, but the rebel promised not to publish his work before giving the matter very careful thought. Monseigneur Bourdingue assured him that he would give special attention to his case and that the interview would have some sequel.

A short time afterwards, on an evening in June, when night was falling over Sainte-Colline, passers-by noticed, stealing away from the College, a tall, lean, bent figure, whose gestures made its appearance somewhat alarming. This shadowy personage was making an odd and striking impression and inevitably drawing attention to himself. The passers-by, few and far between, were surprised to find that he was a priest, surprised to hear him murmuring words of sarcasm and fury, as though he were one of those unhappy people who in their solitude are being tracked down by the phantoms of persecution. Having stopped and turned round before losing sight altogether of the College buildings, this priest gave a burst of laughter, weird laughter, laughter of anger and defiance like that which haunts the approaches to lunatic asylums. Then he plunged into the darkness, with long strides, continuing his frenzied soliloquy.

The explanation of the Abbé Marededieu's abrupt disappearance was given as illness. It was by no means fully accepted, even among the boys, and the truth was not to become generally known until later. It was rumoured that the former professor had returned to secular life, and had thoughts of marriage.

This was not the case, though such events had actually been on the point of taking place. But the Archbishop was keeping his eyes open. Through his good offices the Abbé Marededieu was attached one fine day to a tiptop parish in the chief town of his district, a place with 250,000 inhabitants. He very soon dis-

tinguished himself there as a preacher, so powerful was the effect of his sombre and passionate manner on the feminine members of his congregations. Some pretty women who were particularly daring had the curiosity to approach him in order to see whether he gave them the same impression at close quarters as they had had of him up in the pulpit. In the privacy and the faint mysterious light of the confessional, they thought that he had an extremely attractive voice; they were at the same time thoroughly dismayed by the very humiliating way in which this priest treated them—"exactly like lady's-maids." This, however, which they declared was mad—absolutely unbelievable—far from discouraging them, only gingered them up. They set out to break those sullen moods, to turn that grim being into a sociable one, to make a conquest of this ascetic.

Within a short time the Abbé Marededieu became a professor greatly sought after. There was keen competition among his eager penitents as to who should have the longest secret sessions with him. One can only imagine that the consciences of these elegant sinners were tender and required exceptional attention, for very soon, the confessional being no longer sufficient for their purpose, they adopted the bold expedient of going to see the terrible priest at his own dwelling. He occupied, in a quiet and highly respectable street, a small apartment consisting of three rooms, the door of which was opened by himself, and which by no means gave the impression of a curé's home.

The Abbé Marededieu, for his part, brought such zeal to bear on the performance of his new duties that he would receive scarcely anyone except by appointment, and only one visitor in an afternoon, the reason being that this guardian of souls gave no hasty consultations and detained his fair penitents for a long time. He very soon arrived at the point of making a selection of the most appealing of them, and he refused to see the rest.

It will now be seen that he had made a very great success, indeed, rather too great; for it stirred up quarrels. It was thus that two women in the very highest circles, having met in the drawing-room of a mutual friend, proceeded to treat each other like dirt, with a riot of scurrilous epithets which, coming from these important and charming ladies, caused considerable surprise. The altercation had every appearance of some dramatic case of

jealousy. One of these ladies, who had actually been refused admission at Anthony Street (where the abbé lived) did, in fact, exclaim in a very loud voice that the kind of consolation of which her rival went in search at the apartment of the sinister confessor was that which is ordinarily found in a bachelor's rooms. She maintained that she herself had received proposals which had nothing whatever to do with the good resolution and the penances of redemption. The other lady vehemently replied that if her accuser had really received such proposals (which, considering her distressing face, was excessively unlikely) she would have been only too glad to fall in with them. In short, between these two frantic ladies there was a quite astonishing set-to, the violence and crudity of which were a real delight to the charitably minded onlookers.

This story went the rounds and came to the ears of a husband who did not find it all to his taste. He laid the case before a Jesuit friend of his. This man behaved very well, for despite the contempt which a Jesuit can feel for a mere Trinitarian, it never occurred to him for a moment to be false to the feeling of fellowship by which the clergy of all ranks should be united. He averred that the women who besieged the confessionals are frequently hopeless romancers, that the priests whom he knew were all above suspicion, and that no credence should be placed in such slanderous tales, which were probably distorted and magnified. But the husband had barely departed when the Jesuit rushed off to bear the news piping hot to the Archbishop's palace. He delivered a warning to the Vicar-General with the certainty that the latter would convey it to the Archbishop himself. This, in fact, he did, and without delay. The Vicar-General was afraid of being badgered by other kindly informers, who were swarming in the diocese to a dangerous extent. Further, he took a certain refined pleasure in bringing the Abbé Marededieu down a peg or two. The latter, as we know, was not sympathetically regarded by his fellow priests, and the success which had come to him was obviously not calculated to make him better liked than he had been before.

However, Monseigneur Bourdingue cut short the oily, smooth-tongued exposition of the case.

"Father Marededieu," he said, "has intelligence and character. I am not going to deprive the Church of his very genuine services on account of a story in which there may not be a word of truth. And supposing the worst has happened, and the lady in question has been altogether too kind to him, it will mean that she has had lovers before. Conscientious as I know him to be, Father Marededieu will certainly have taken the precaution to make sure of this. On the other hand, it seems to me preferable, so far as prestige is concerned, that when they have a lapse our Fathers should choose the mistress rather than the servant. The fact is, I don't feel that this little misdemeanour, if we do take it as having happened, should bear any weight if we compare it with the very edifying effect produced on congregations of a high standard by the remarkable sermons of this great preacher. Be careful to keep me informed of anything you may hear, but take no steps without instructions from me. We must avoid acting as calumniators. What passes within the Church should not become known outside it. Our cloth should never be open to suspicion."

Soon after this incident it became generally believed that the Abbé Marededieu was a *persona grata* at the Archbishop's palace, that through the medium of the women he was in close touch with all the best society, and that he was engaged on an important work, the outcome of much patient research, in support of ecclesiastical celibacy, against which some dissident priests were conducting a secret campaign.

The Abbé Marededieu was destined to reappear three years later at Sainte-Colline. He went there to preach a retreat. The brilliant preacher bore little resemblance to the professor of former years. He seemed to be far more sociable. There was an air of prosperity, a look of serenity about him, with traces of a desire for elegance in his personal appearance. The theme which he chose for his sermons was "self-control and the passions." He had some very beautiful things to say on that subject, on a high level, and expressed in phraseology of uncommon excellence. He quite clearly outclassed the Abbé Luche, who was the best orator in the College. The Superior made the best of a bad job. He congratulated his former subordinate warmly, without slipping in the slightest allusion to the "Confessions of a Priest," the

reading of which had once occupied him for a whole night. The Abbé Marededieu had certainly lost all recollection of this, for he showed no embarrassment of any kind. His dealings with women in good society had given him an amiable manner, which was accompanied by a faint suggestion of patronage. The Abbé Fuche said to himself: "He'll be a success, that man will!" A slight pang of regret he had, and that was for having despatched to the Archbishop's palace a certain unorthodox manuscript, which had been the starting-point of this brilliant ecclesiastical career.

Monseigneur Bourdingue had been accustomed to make this declaration: "Before one forms any definite opinion, one must think carefully and try to take the long view. Good is that which serves the Church's interests. Evil is that which is harmful to them." No one could deny that the change in the Abbé Marededieu's fortunes, his convictions, and his general outlook on life, was the very clever and very useful work of this prelate, beneath whose rough and churlish manners there lay a very deep sense of realities, and an unequalled capacity for judging men, bringing influence to bear on them, and employing them in such a way as to bring out all the best that was in them. As we have just seen, he succeeded in turning an exasperated priest into an instrument for both edification and recruitment. And the advantages were shared by everybody. If some day the life of Monseigneur Bourdingue comes to be written, a feature on which special stress should be laid is that constant anxiety of his to serve the Church, while remaining impervious to prejudice and narrow-mindedness—a quality which made him a really great representative of the French episcopate.

CHAP. IX: VICTIMS OF FATE

M. ALFRED NUSILLON had the highest and most ambitious conception of the paternal function. All his efforts in the sphere of his offspring's education tended to earn him a reputation for

being a father of Spartan temper. Now the fathers of Lacedaemon, M. Nusillon thought, had been splendid slaughterers of their children, and this had produced the virile, tough, and gallant race whose warlike enterprises made ancient Greece, including the Peloponnese, tremble with terror, and shook her to her very foundations.

As is generally known, in those heroic Spartan times children with physical defects or malformations were done away with at birth. That healthy, wholesome custom, with its regard for aesthetic susceptibility, was subsequently abolished thanks to the mawkish sentimentality of civilization and the kindly teaching of Jesus Christ (a teaching so contrary to the principles of biology, which would have the strong prey upon the weak). Those new ideas have been so misinterpreted that nowadays one sees scrofulous and mental patients maintained, often to an advanced age, in expensive asylums, while the finest specimens of youth are being disembowelled on fields of battle.

It is of course true that M. Nusillon, whose feelings had been subject to the softening influence of the custom of showing mercy which has now been so long in vogue among our species, did not go so far as to regret the loss of the rights of the primitive parent, who could accept or reject, as he pleased, the little being which had been born to him. But as he had formerly been nourished on a diet of intensive classical culture (the effects of which, however, had since vanished *in toto*) was very much enamoured of the privileges of the ancient *paterfamilias*, and anxious to re-establish, in a decadent world, the old patriarchal laws which were the foundation whereon the grandeur of the ancient empires was built, M. Nusillon prided himself on bringing up his son in accordance with the best principles of Antiquity. (His admiration for those principles had been responsible for his choice of Christian names—Hector, Caesar, Octavius.)

It seems that the educators of ancient times recommended that boys should be vigorously thrashed, in order, as this exemplary father was wont to say, to make them sit up. That, at least, is what M. Nusillon had got into his head, and inferred from it that his principal duty was to belabour the son of so gallant a sire, the transmission of whose valorous qualities was unhappily counter-

acted by Mme Nusillon, through whom those qualities had been so diluted as to reach a nauseating insipidity; Mme Nusillon, *née* Eugène Mortifioux, being herself the daughter of a chemist of Laroche-Garigue (as has been already related), inventor of a sovereign remedy known as *Bilioline*, which restored coated tongues to their proper condition by its immediate effects on the liver and spleen.

To have become a father was nothing, especially when it is remembered that M. Nusillon had begotten his son in the heedless raptures of the early months of his marriage, when the tissues of Mme Nusillon, a woman of somewhat flabby frame and destined to premature deteriorations, were still in good order, and the young woman, at the age of twenty-six, could show a freshness and bloom of stimulating quality. To become a father is nothing, but to educate one's child is everything, especially when that child is a boy. To have Hector brilliantly educated, to obtain from this child, despite his natural apathy, the greatest possible yield, in order to make him, later on, a man comparable with the one M. Nusillon flattered himself on being, that is to say, a hard worker, energetic, loyal, a fruitful source of successful initiative, a man who, wherever he goes, leaves striking impressions behind him—such was the aim which this father was keeping in view. To set the feet of a mulish and decidedly stupid child on the road which leads to the highest virile perfection was, as will be realized, a task no less meritorious than it was difficult. But a persevering father, jealous for the high reputation of his own family, should be prepared to take unlimited trouble, and have no hesitation in his choice of the means to his end.

M. Nusillon believed in the thorough effectiveness of blows, pullings of the ears, and kicks on the bottom. Similarly, he believed it to be healthy for a child's mind that his head should be close-shaven once a month. Such nudity of the scalp removed all tendency to personal vanity, and the time which the boy would have occupied in rummaging about in a thick head of hair, in devising capillary whims and fancies, would be far more profitably spent in the study of Xenophon, Cicero, and Livy. In the same way, so this parent also thought, extreme poverty of dress should have the best of effects on the character, seeing that it

accustomed the individual at an early age to overcome the handicap of an unfortunate appearance and make his way in the world through qualities which owed nothing to artifice. With this idea firmly fixed in his mind, M. Nusillon allowed his son to wear the most pitiful clothes, so much so that this boy easily beat all records at Sainte-Colline for holes in the seats of trousers.

Furthermore, M. Nusillon, prepared for any sacrifice and losing no opportunity of displaying his vigour, did better still. About once a term he took the train and appeared at the College, burning with fierce wrath, to the flames of which he had been careful, on the journey, to add fuel systematically, by making out a detailed list of his causes of complaint against his son. For he was a man of order and principle, who took his stand on justice, and omitted no precaution in this matter. At the College, M. Nusillon made the parlour resound with the noble vociferations of outraged paternity, shocked by the blank stupidity and sullen ill will of its offspring. Fearless of adverse criticism, free from the inhibitions and the vapid sense of decorum by which too many people are restrained from acting in accordance with their own ideas, and feeling on the contrary a legitimate pride in setting too feeble parents a good example in the dealing out of harsh but beneficial treatment, he thrashed his son in the presence of others with a determination which their horror was powerless to mitigate.

Knowing nothing whatever of the plan of these punitive expeditions, and having lived in a state of terror for the past sixteen years, Mme Nusillon had no power to do anything for the defence of her son. Moreover, the premature waning of her bodily charms gave her a very keen sense of guilt on her own part. This early decline, which had set in after her confinement and was greatly emphasized by a most distressing increase of girth of breast and stomach, was sometimes cast in her teeth as a swindle. M. Nusillon let it be understood that he bitterly regretted having formerly married, on the strength of her innocent and very youthful appearance, a girl whose curves and outlines were to be rapidly buried beneath a thick and unsightly layer of fat.

It was an accepted belief in this family that Hector's wrong

instincts and intellectual insufficiency were due to a defective strain in the Mortifioux family, a dull, flabby stock, hypocritical too, and much given to bewailing and tears, while the fearless and excellent breed of the Nusillons could boast of having produced a long succession of remarkable individuals, of whom the present head of the family was not the least shining example. All this had now been obvious and indisputable for a long time past. Unfortunately, Mme Nusillon had a brother, Eugène Mortifioux, who was a bad lot, and at the age of thirty-seven suddenly disappeared, leaving business and wife and children in the lurch, but taking with him the small bank balance which he still had left. This brother had never been heard of again. He was thought to have gone to America or the colonies, and to be either dead or in prison. "More likely in prison" was what M. Nusillon was wont to proclaim, this gentleman having a fixed and unalterable opinion of the members of the pitiable family to which the sacred ties of marriage had bound him. Ever since that time the Mortifioux had been weighed down by a sense of shame, and the lamentable Hector was having constantly to listen to a prediction that he would come to resemble "that scoundrel Eugène, that blackguard of an uncle of yours!" "But, my God," this parent would add, "I'd rather slaughter you before *that* happened!" And to save his name from the infamy which might accrue to it from the exploits of an unworthy heir, he would thrash his son once more. Mme Nusillon's tears and lamentations were heart-rending, but the effect of her grief was a continual accentuation of her growing bulk; and so it was that everything in this family was going from bad to worse, and that M. Nusillon was regarding himself more and more as being entitled to play the martyr.

We have seen that not even distance could save Hector Nusillon from his father's visitations and harsh treatment. With one beating a term (though a very provoking element of ridicule was involved, for this boy, in the exercise of the paternal authority—thus conceived—in the presence of other people) the dose would, on the whole, have been endurable. But M. Nusillon, always displaying, where education on the lines of antiquity was concerned, both subtlety and constant perseverance, had conceived

and perfected a system of persecution by correspondence which never allowed the youthful Hector to forget that he had a fierce and savage father, that his father was on the look-out for him, and that all accounts would be duly settled.

Every week, in answer to a letter which contained his deplorable report, Hector Nusillon received a letter so packed with reproaches, threats, and insults, that he kept it in his pocket without daring to read it, hoping that the next one might be in answer to some better report, and consequently less cruel. As the better report never arrived, from time to time the boy made up his mind to read one of these terrible missives. The beautiful paternal handwriting, rich in flourishes and adornments, abounded in sarcastic expressions, rules of conduct which were a degradation to read, and promises of thrashings compared with which those of the past would seem like gentle games. Hector Nusillon shivered as his eyes raced along the flashing lines and circled round whole paragraphs, in the body of which such expressions as these were glittering—"your poor mother's despair," "a disgrace to your family," "reformatory," "French legion," "the scaffold," and other charming remarks and forecasts of a similar nature. The impressive signature of M. Nusillon, in its setting of bold and decisive arabesques, was preceded by no tender phrase. The boy tore these epistles into tiny fragments and ran and threw them away in the privies—a proof that he had not become hardened or inured. Reading these letters made him ill.

Here was a strange thing, which M. Nusillon found extraordinary, and which he regarded as a case of defiance of himself by an essentially perverted nature; these methods of education brought no improvement whatever in Hector's conduct, nor made him use his brains; but they had given him a dull, besotted air which seemed incurable, especially in his father's presence. "Abominable hypocrisy!" the latter would exclaim, "I won't be taken in by it!" And there were blows and there were curses, and the youthful Hector looked more and more like a half-wit, while Mme Nusillon, terribly upset, could do nothing but groan and lament: "Oh, Alfred, I beg of you! Oh, Alfred, not on his head, please, please!" At last M. Nusillon would let his victim go, as he yelled: "Ah, he's a *Mortifoux* all over, that boy is!

He belongs to your family, right enough. But just have a little patience and I'll lick him into shape! I swear I will!"

It will have been evident from the foregoing that the home of the Nusillons was a place where terror held permanent sway. Young Hector, who was continually being threatened and made black and blue, had but one idea in his head—to escape from the roof of the good parent who was so ruthlessly intent on giving him too virile an education. The greatest pleasure this boy had, his greatest prospect of happiness, was to imagine catastrophes which would make him an orphan. On days when there was a very high wind he had a ray of hope when he thought of the chimneys which fall with a crash from above. Doubtless he did not go so far as to have murderous intentions, and cleared his mind of so evil a thought as a wish to kill his father, but he could not help feeling that a calamity which would lay M. Nusillon out stone dead would suit him down to the ground. And some of Mme Nusillon's sighs, certain looks of distress which she cast up to heaven, the floods of tears which she shed on every possible occasion, were a fair indication that the poor woman would have borne a state of widowhood with considerable fortitude. . . .

It might well seem astonishing that the young and pitiable Hector, with all the prompting of terrors which never entirely left him, was not a well-behaved boy at the College. Was it reaction, a need to relax? The fact remains that his behaviour at Sainte-Colline was that of a scatterbrain, and that punishments rained down upon him. These punishments entailed further paternal thrashings, which meant fresh unhappiness and trouble, and this in turn resulted in still more ineptitude, so that when at last he escaped from his father's ministrations, the boy was incapable of avoiding being kept in and other punishments. These successions of cause and effect made up a vicious circle from which our schoolboy was powerless to escape, though longing with all his heart to do so, for he had the most excellent reasons for trying to forestall displeasure. But his situation was an incredibly unfortunate one. With the best intentions in the world, he relapsed into an endless cycle of misdemeanours, chastisements, and fears, by which his mind was haunted. . . .

Does all this imply that the boy was incapable of receiving

instruction, that this form of incompetence was likely to be a forerunner of others, and that there was no hope for him? One does not dare, considering his age, to put forward any definite theory. (Perhaps his youthful faculties had not yet found a real opportunity for displaying themselves.)

Does it imply that a system of education based on harshness and blows was not suitable for him? That after all is possible. No system of education is either wholly good or wholly bad in itself. It is only in its application, it is only by the effects it has on this or that subject, that one can judge the suitability of a system. This is quite certain—that education on Spartan lines, as understood by M. Nusillon, wrought no improvement in Hector. Sometimes it induced a state of dull, besotted stupidity, at others, drove him to wild and extravagant behaviour; at times it plunged him into an alarming condition of melancholy, at others, brought on a fit of frenzied excitement and joy, no less alarming. He failed to strike a proper balance between these extremes, to be true to his real type.

There is one point which is of the greatest importance and significance in this little educational discussion, for it has a very human appeal. Hector Nusillon understood nothing of the tragedy of his parentage or his own nature. He deplored them nevertheless, while making fruitless efforts to find a remedy. This is the point that we must emphasize—that he was profoundly unhappy. (And human beings never make unhappiness their choice.)

This feeling had the effect of isolating him, for it is the way of unhappiness to make people retire within themselves, and to cut them off from others. This solitude caused him much secret suffering, and he was conscious of the fact that his comrades, who were not going through the same shameful ordeals as he was, were unable to understand him. He should have had a confidant whose distress was comparable with his own. He was finding no one.

These were his circumstances when, at the infirmary, he came in contact with little Patafiat, a pupil in the seventh form. This child had his face disfigured by a sty which was making the

eyelid of his left eye swollen; while Nusillon had had a fall in the playground and cut his knee open. Belonging to different divisions the two boys hardly knew each other by sight. But there was something which struck Nusillon immediately, and that was the look of deep melancholy which marred the little boy's features. The slight trouble with his eye was not enough to explain it.

When the dressings were finished, Nusillon stopped little Patafiat in the corridor of the infirmary, where he had been waiting for him.

"What's your name?" he asked him.

"Patafiat—Robert," the child answered.

"I'm Nusillon. Ever heard of me?"

"Yes," said Patafiat.

"That eye hurting you?"

"Oh, not much!" the little boy replied.

"Then why are you looking all anyhow?"

"I don't know," Patafiat said, almost in a whisper.

And he uttered something that sounded very like a sob. This made Nusillon feel very gentle towards him, and he asked:

"You unhappy?"

"I don't know," Patafiat said again, even more softly than before.

Nusillon persisted.

"Oh, come on, tell me, if you're unhappy!"

"Yes," Patafiat said at last. And he burst out into unrestrained sobbing.

"So am I," Nusillon said proudly. "I'm unhappy too. I'm unhappier than you are. I'm more unhappy than anyone else in the whole College. Well, look at me. Am I crying?"

"No," said Patafiat.

"Well, then, why are you? Do they beat you at home?"

"No," Patafiat said.

"You don't get thrashed by your father—not ever?"

"I haven't got a father now," Patafiat said.

"Well, you *are* a lucky kid!" said Nusillon.

He drew himself up, and pointed with a wide, sweeping gesture to the walls of the College, and beyond those walls to places of

his own imagination—a whole assemblage of things vague and indefinite, and designed for the oppression of children, for their martyrdom. He declared:

"They're all a lot of swine—not worth bothering about! And now about you. What's your trouble?"

"It's because . . ." said Patafiat, "because of my mother."

"Is she ill?"

"She doesn't love me like she used to," Patafiat said.

"Well, my father's never loved me," said Nusillon. "Never. Do you understand?"

Then he suddenly blazed out, with an angry sneer which showed plainly that the boy was not happy:

"What do I care! I don't care a damn! No. I don't care a damn for my father! And I'm going to do a bunk anyway!"

Little Patafiat looked at him with some astonishment, which was not unmixed with fear. And at the same time he felt confidence. A great, an urgent need of friendship was attracting him to Nusillon, who seemed to him so strong, so determined, and capable of resisting the forces of evil beneath whose weight he himself was being crushed, so small and fragile was he, and almost one-eyed with this horrid pimple on his eye.

Then Nusillon asked him gently:

"Would you like it if we met again?"

"Yes," Patafiat said.

"Right you are, then I'll manage something. To-morrow, here, I'll explain to you. Th. all right?"

"Yes," said Patafiat.

"But you won't say anything about it? Not to a single soul?"

"Oh, no!" Patafiat said, with a great burst of enthusiasm.

"Swear."

"I swear on my mother!" Patafiat said solemnly.

Nusillon realized that an oath in that form was the most sacred and binding that this child could ever have uttered.

A pupil of the seventh form, oversensitive and with a delicate constitution, little Patafiat also was extremely unhappy, though the reasons for his unhappiness were just the opposite of those on account of which Nusillon was so miserable. While the latter

had never known the sweetness of an affection which encourages and protects its object, on Patafiat it had been so richly bestowed that the idea of a future in which he could no longer enjoy it was more than he could bear. The College, with its bareness and its discipline, had turned him into an inconsolable orphan.

Patafiat's history was closely bound up with that of his mother, Eliane, who had lately become Mme Aufraide.

Eliane Desmuraux, a fair-haired girl of tender disposition, exceedingly pretty and with a good dowry, had married at the age of nineteen the handsome and dangerous George Patafiat; this she had done against the advice of her family who, for a multitude of reasons relating to the young man himself, viewed this marriage with anything but a favourable eye. It was a romance rather than a love-match in the ordinary sense, for Eliane had her own conception of love—of which she knew nothing—and it was an absurd one, as she discovered subsequently only too well, for she soon found that the realities of marriage have but little resemblance to the daydreams of a young girl brought up on somewhat indolent and luxurious lines. Disillusioned and deceived, exposed by a gambler to a constant process of impoverishment, and lacking the energy for self-defence, she made her young son the mainspring of her life and spent several years in this manner, waiting for a catastrophe which would leave her abandoned for good and all, and in all likelihood penniless. The catastrophe duly arrived—but it saved her. George Patafiat was killed, most providentially, in a railway accident, before the dissipation of their capital was complete. For Eliane there remained a small annual income and a promise of a handsome legacy. As she could face the future without anxiety, she swore to herself that she would remain a happy and unencumbered widow, who would travel as she felt inclined, be dependent on nobody, make friends with nice people, and later on have a grown-up son who would be the friend and companion of her declining years. The woman in love, and disillusioned, was vanishing, and the mother taking her place. Never again would she burden herself with a man.

It was a new and lengthy period, during which, idolized and spoilt to the utmost degree, Robert Patafiat enjoyed a cup of

childish happiness that was filled to the brim, never parted from an ideal mother who was always gay and charming and kind. These years went happily forward until Eliane was thirty, an age which showed her at her very best. She had acquired a warm and delightful fullness of figure, her fair hair and complexion were as brilliant as ever, and the liberty which she had been enjoying was giving her an engaging personality, greatly superior to that which she had had as a girl and a very young woman. She was very attractive physically, and men let her know it and would have been only too glad to make love to her. She knew that she appealed to them; she enjoyed this and it was all she wanted; it did not stir her in any way. She kept on saying to herself: "What foolishness to fall in love! Most likely one has to go through it in order to be cured of it. But to plunge oneself once more into that ridiculous form of subjection would be sheer madness!" Her solitude was no burden to her.

She had no means of knowing that the blossoming of her maturity was about to change all that, and that in reality she was incurably romantic. Her long period of retirement had prepared the way for a new adventure on which she would embark with a violence—this time wholehearted—of which she did not know herself to be capable. There came a day when something melted within her, and flooded her with a strange sweetness, a sweetness that was quite impersonal, but which had the attraction of a presentiment of coming passion. She had soon to confess to herself that she was wise for the accomplishment of the mystery which she felt was stirring within her, a mystery of the same nature exactly as that to which she aspired as a young girl, but she was discovering resources within herself that she had never possessed, nor even suspected. She had likewise to confess that her little boy's hugs and endearments gave her a desire for much stronger embraces, embraces sufficient to exhaust her, to leave her sobbing, overwhelmed.

She was saying to herself, a little anxiously: "Strange—I'm quite altered. Can I have been mistaken about myself?" As she said it she had already guessed that she had been mistaken to an extent which might make her mourn the loss of the past ten years of her young womanhood, years which had failed to give

her the intense pleasures by which, though enjoyed in imagination only, her now rich and firmer flesh was being so strangely stirred. That flesh, which had been so long denied its natural rights, had become insistent in its claims. There were elements in love which in marriage had passed Eliane by. But intuition now told her that love held other allurements, and she felt that the hour had come to discover them, and to yield.

This was her condition and frame of mind when she met M. Denis Aufralde and soon realized that her destiny was written in the sombre gaze with which this man's eyes immediately held her own, in the relentless but caressing insistence of that look which was never for one second withdrawn, during that first meeting of theirs. Fascinated by this gaze, she could offer but feeble resistance to the vehemence of M. Aufralde's wooing: he had been clever enough to appear at exactly the right moment in her life. This ardent lover showed her how moving she was; how rich a storehouse of feminine treasure; how jealous of her one could be. Jealous indeed he was, and tyrannically so; but exquisitely too, for this jealousy, by which she felt exalted, made Eliane the sun of a universe of love, in the heat of which her little troubles of the past just melted away; as did also each new and blithesome day, in an ecstasy which drowned all sense of the passage of its hours. There was one overmastering need that prevailed over all else—the need of a certain presence, the tones of a certain voice, and the rest went for naught. M. Aufralde married her, monopolized her, dominated her completely.

This was the starting-point of little Patafiat's tragedy. The first step taken after his marriage by M. Aufralde, who would submit to no competition of any kind whatsoever where his wife's love was concerned, was to insist on his young stepson's being sent to a boarding-school—even in the child's own interest, saying that this "would give him grit, and that he would be all the better later on for having been brought up in a rigorous way." He made Eliane a little speech, the upshot of which was that her affection, which was certainly praiseworthy but deplorably weak, might have grievous results in the future. "A man's life, darling," M. Aufralde remarked, "is not spent at his mother's apron-strings." He added that the duty of parents does not lie in indul-

gence. "And moreover," he continued, "I am saying all this because he is your son. If Robert were my son I shouldn't even consult you."

Eliane was not prepared to argue the matter. Wholly absorbed in her happiness, to promote it she betrayed her own nature, whose imprint her imaginative and tender child so clearly bore. Robert Patafiat, separated from his mother for the first time, went to the College, and so great was the force of the new habits which her husband had given to Eliane that she almost forgot her son. She neglected him terribly. Poor little Robert now stood for little more in her thoughts than a penalty for an error of her youth, a living encumbrance bequeathed to her by a past which had lacked the fervour of true love, and for which her husband reproached her bitterly at times when his jealous, possessive moods had special hold of him. Desire to wipe out that past drew the mother away from her son: "Oh, well," she would say to herself airily, "he'll get used to it. . . ."

But Robert Patafiat, fearfully out of his element at Sainte-Colline, could not accustom himself to the loss of his sweet, his pretty, his indispensable mother. With a strong sentimental feeling which was a source of agony for him, his only resource was tears. He shed them continually.

As long as no suspicions are aroused, it is easy enough to put people off the scent. In playgrounds where considerable numbers of boys, most of them wild and boisterous, were playing, the disappearance of one only among them would not be noticed. Now there were a dozen different ways of getting away from the playgrounds in secret, and they were during the hours of recreation, when comings and goings in the corridors were an ordinary occurrence.

We have already said that there were two main staircases which served the whole College. The one on the left was far more in use than the other. It gave access to the linen room, the infirmary, a dormitory, and the entertainment hall. In a corner of the latter, in the wings at the side of the stage where some old scenery was stacked, and hidden by this, there was a small wooden staircase, narrow and dusty, which led up to the central portion of the

immense lofts which the College possessed. The existence of this opening, which had long been thus concealed, had fallen into oblivion. (This was the reason why it had never been blocked up.) It was by a matter of chance that Nusillon, prying about there on the sly, had discovered it. He might have boasted about it (this had been his immediate impulse, a very natural one for a schoolboy), but his love of solitude prompted him to do nothing of the kind. From that time onwards he would have at his disposal a place of refuge, comparatively unknown to anyone else, and also providing him with a wonderful field of exploration. He was quite carried away by the idea of knowing and keeping entirely to himself a secret of such importance. When wandering about alone up there, Nusillon felt as though he were lording it over the whole establishment. He had a distinct impression that this secluded spot would sooner or later be of the greatest assistance to him. On what occasion this would be he could not have said; but he thought it better to let no one into the secret of his discovery.

This secret which he guarded so jealously, Nusillon had no hesitation in entrusting to his friend Patafiat, thereby showing that he had definitely picked out this little boy and given him his confidence. Patafiat responded warmly, and displayed immense admiration for him, together with complete submissiveness.

About twice a week, and preferably at the five o'clock recreation, the two boys escaped from their playgrounds and met in the lofts. There they enjoyed a few minutes of warm and comforting friendship, based on an identical situation, that of abandoned and lonely children, flouted, punished, helpless and friendless. In their conversations, made up of daydreams and boyish ingenuousness, vague plans were revolved and discussed, childlike visions of a happiness faintly glimpsed, to be enjoyed later on when they were grown-up men. They were impatient to grow older, to gain in independence, in boldness, in strength, confident that as young men they would be fully capable of obtaining those compensations, of taking those revenges, to which already they were reaching out—poor, miserable children that they were, shivering a little in the cold and covered with dust, inclined to be frightened in those lofts shrouded in their semi-darkness, where the furtive

helter-skelter of a mouse or the strange, piercing cry of a bird grazing the roof in its swift flight made them shudder and wince.

Little Patafiat declared that he would wrest his sweet mother from M. Aufraide, that wicked man who was keeping her a prisoner by methods the secret of which her son would easily manage to unravel. Together with that inother who was so indispensable to him, he would flee to the colonies or America, and nothing would ever part them again.

"And what about your stepfather?" Nusillon asked. "Supposing he goes to look for you and finds you?"

"I shall kill him!" was the unhesitating reply of a small Patafiat scarcely ten years old, in whose heart love and hatred, fighting tragically for its possession, were filling him with fierce courage. "I shall have a revolver, you bet I shall!"

"Perhaps she loves him, that man . . ." Nusillon said.

"No," little Patafiat said, in a sombre tone of voice, while in his small pale face there appeared an expression of intense grief. "It's me she loves, I'm sure of it. But she doesn't dare to show it, you understand. She doesn't dare because that man with his dark eyes and thick arms frightens her. I can see she's frightened. I see how queer she looks altogether, when he's there. And what's more you'd think I was making her feel ashamed, sometimes, just as if she wanted to beg my pardon. . . ."

"Perhaps he's rich too, your stepfather. . . ."

"My mummy wouldn't care a bit about that," said Patafiat, there being no lofty sentiment that he did not attribute to his mother. "Besides, I shall get richer than my stepfather."

"How will you do that?" Nusillon asked.

"I'll invent something. It pays, you know, that does."

"Have you got an idea for an invention that'd do?"

"I'm trying to think of one," little Patafiat said gravely. Then, full of assurance, he added:

"There's plenty of things to invent, you bet there are! Look at indiarubber heels, safety-pins, press-fasteners—they're inventions, and sometimes you can make a fortune out of them, without any bother at all. So you see!"

"Well, I should like something dangerous, where you make lots of money, and travel about all the time as part of the job.

Something that gives cold shivers to people looking up in the air at you from down below, and clapping their hands, and women giving little shrieks and saying, 'I simply can't look at it!' In some big circus, that's where I'd like to be. Something or other like the flying trapeze, or the trick cyclist's act, or the lion's jaws where you twist round inside, and get eaten up if you fall in. The more you brazen it out the bigger pay you get, in circuses. Acrobats are thought a lot of. Then the girl who does the circus-riding, or the woman-snake, falls in love with you."

"Ah! . . ." said Patafiat, who as yet had formed no opinions on female circus-riders. "And your father, will he let you work in a circus?"

"My father can go to hell!" said Nusillon. "How I'll send him to the rightabout when I'm bigger! He'd jolly well better not try and touch me when I'm a strong grown-up man."

"Won't you be seeing your parents any more, then?"

"Oh, my mother sometimes, 'cause she's not so bad, even though she does blub a lot; it's her funk of that father of mine that makes her do it. . . . I shall send her free tickets so she can come and see me at the circus. But my father—I'll tick him off properly, that I will! 'Sir,' I'll say to him, like someone who doesn't know him at all, who's got nothing to do with him. And I'll be ever so stand-offish, just like as if I was a stranger. He'll be sorry for all those biffs he's given me so often, he'll wish he hadn't, you bet he will!"

Their secret meetings, and childish talk like this, sustained the two boys and gave them courage. They were less conscious of their troubles now that each had a friend. Then, suddenly, events came thick and fast.

Hector Nusillon received a letter from his father, one of those atrocious letters the reading of which he was accustomed to put off until some time later. But he had an intuitive feeling, based on his wild fear of his father, that he ought to learn the contents of this last letter without delay. He had reasons for supposing that these would be particularly dreadful, with threats even worse than usual; and he felt that some great danger might suddenly confront him, a danger against which the College walls would afford him no protection.

Adopting his usual method of reading the paternal effusions apart from all prying eyes (in order that no one should be able to see his expression while reading the scathing epithets with which M. Nusillon lashed his son from a distance), the boy ran and shut himself up in the privies. He emerged looking very anxious and very gloomy, having sedulously torn up into tiny pieces and thrown away the horrible missive. Here is the text:

"You little ruffian, you young scamp, you idler, you block-head, you dirty, hopeless little vagabond, just you wait for me! I'm coming along one of these days. And I swear that your bottom is going to smart, I swear it by the hand of your own father, and that hand is itching already, you little scoundrel, you little blackguard, you little good-for-nothing.

"ALFRED NUSILLON"

This letter, then, announced as imminent one of those thrashings on the grand scale which left the boy stammering and incoherent, and would have sent him, distraught with terror, rushing off to some unknown regions of the world, could he but have felt certain of being beyond the reach of a father (or even his ghost) who fed him on the strong meat of a Spartan education. In any case M. Nusillon would beyond all doubt be appearing shortly at the school, and he would no sooner arrive than "the performance would commence," as this reformer of character was wont to remark with sage emphasis.

Our schoolboy entered upon a phase of preliminary anguish which he knew only too well. Long premonitory shivers rippled over his epidermis as he suffered in imagination the blows which would soon be raining down upon him. A grin of hatred and malice, proceeding from a parent dispensing justice, brooded heavily over these painful meetings, the echoes of which would be reaching his young friends and making them chuckle mischievously on his account. Perhaps the most dreadful feature of these ordeals was that look of hatred that appeared in his father's face, and the feeling of degradation and disgrace which he had when escaping from the parental clutches, covered with bruises, and blushing with shame and the tears which he was unable to

suppress. To the horror of being a victim foreordained was added the dishonour of being compelled to shed tears in public.

He was not, on the whole, surprised at what had happened. He had known for some days past that his last report could not fail to bring consequences of this nature. He had just beaten all records at Sainte-Colline for bad marks, a very noteworthy exploit, the originality of which any father with the slightest taste for the fantastic would have appreciated. Unfortunately M. Alfred Nusillon was not that sort of father at all.

The weekly reports were an obsession with Nusillon. As each Saturday came round, and the Vice-Principal went through the three Divisions to read out the marks, the boy trembled as he waited to hear the announcement, pitilessly delivered, of his fate for a week. A cold, unemotional verdict, the reasons for which were incomprehensible, and one which would add fuel to the flames of wrath forty miles away and abounding in cuffs and blows, insults and abuse, kicks in the bottom, and irritations of every kind.

Marks were calculated by a strange form of ready reckoning, which varied in its application to form work, set tasks, exercises, lessons, conduct, etc. The maximum was 70. Between 50 and 70 gained an "honourable mention." (Generally, speaking, a minimum of three honourable mentions a term was required to avoid being kept back in the holidays.) But in addition to these, there were other marks exclusively for punishment, which could be deducted from the general total. (This disciplinary marking was only resorted to in cases of serious misdemeanours of moral implication.) Under this system, Nusillon had just obtained the sensational total of -31 points. It was the highest total below zero that had ever been registered. This result was due to a -20 for "religious observance" which had made the whole Division shudder with horror, conduct in religious matters being at Sainte-Colline a most sensitive spot, the most delicate matter of all those affecting the life of the community. The Abbé Jubil, as an exceptional measure, had turned Nusillon out of the chapel while a service was still in progress. The reason for this must be explained.

It was the custom, during the numerous Masses which the

pupils had to attend, to sing hymns. This was an excellent arrangement, since it occupied the boys' minds, which were easily distracted from their prayers, while they themselves would otherwise doubtless have spent the periods of divine service with wandering thoughts of a more or less pernicious and emphatically a secular nature. As a general rule one hymn was sung before the elevation, and two after. The abbé who played the harmonium (the organ was used only on very special occasions) intoned the opening words, after a few bars of introduction. The whole College then joined in (including the masters who, from their stalls, had a raking view of the pupils' benches from end to end, so that supervision and piety on the one side, and piety and fear on the other, marched abreast. This constituted a somewhat heterogeneous choir, which was towed along by two or three strong voices with a better sense of rhythm. The result could not exactly have been described as harmonious. Still, this flood of sound, though various discords and hesitations were borne along its surface, made up a fitting and appropriate offering of corporate worship which, in its general effect, gave the impression of a sincere and powerful outpouring of faith. When the rigours of the winter weather were at their worst, the participation of people with colds somewhat marred the unity of this edifying whole, but no sooner did spring return than it regained its clear, seraphic tones.

Wilful and obstinate, caring nothing for music, and with a total inability to sing in tune, Nusillon had a horror of such exercise. Further, in the too familiar words of the hymns he found no source of entertainment, no attractive power of suggestion. If he compared one boring job with another, he preferred the Latin psalms. Being almost entirely ignorant of the beautiful dead language on which the whole teaching of the College was based, he attributed to it some mysterious, vaguely exotic meaning, and he thought it fun to repeat solemnly, over and over again, things that were incomprehensible to him. The boy thus reached a point of making certain concessions in this matter of singing, but his method was veiled in much obscurity. During Holy Week he showed great partiality to the Lamentations of Jeremiah; at other times he preferred to abstain.

Sometimes, no doubt, simply in order to be left in peace, he would move his lips, or else, holding his handkerchief over his nose, make a pretence of sneezing or fits of coughing. But he was no less disgusted at having to resort to such hypocrisy than he was at being forced to pray to God in music, to which he objected on the ground that he might have plenty to say to Him without all this noise, things far more interesting, and in any case personal and intimate to the last degree. He felt that it was a more urgent matter, before asking Him to "save Rome and France," to beseech the Sacred Heart to get him, Nusillon, out of the mess of his troubles at school and at home against which he was struggling so unsuccessfully; and the manner in which he addressed himself to the Sacred Heart or to the Holy Virgin was no one's business but his own.

This dumbness at the chapel made Nusillon a victim of the Abbé Jubil, who knew nothing but the system, and applied it with a voluptuousness in which there was an element of sombre sadism. It was one's duty to sing, and Nusillon must sing like the rest, and if he persisted in not doing so, impositions and periods of being kept in would continue to rain down upon him.

And that is what happened, and to such an extent that at last Nusillon made up his mind to sing; but he swore that in doing so he would take revenge on his persecutor. And the boy did in fact sing, his nose buried in his hymn-book, but what he sang was strangely at variance with sacred ritual, which he slyly interlarded with words such as these: "Jubil's a damned swine, and I'll plague the life out of him, the ass! I'll worry him to death, the rotten old worn-out Flabbyfoot in a cassock. *Worriendum est Jubilas. Et worrio, worriabo Jubilem.*" On this basic theme Nusillon, during the singing of the hymns, gave himself up to inspiration, and these exercises resulted in immense progress on his part in the conjugation of Latin verbs, to the great astonishment of his professor.

From that time onwards Nusillon took a certain pleasure in singing. While in the act of doing so, he would shoot lively glances at his enemy that were full of scorn, and meant something like this: "You idiot, you tried to make me sing, did you? Well, now you've got what you wanted!"

The Abbé Jubil grew suspicious. (In any case, if suspicion were

called for, he was always prompt in supplying it.) As the result of keeping his attention steadily fixed upon Nusillon, he noticed that the movements of his lips did not fit in with the words of the hymns—words which he himself sang with much zeal. Mistrustful as ever, the abbé allotted the boy a new seat, at the extreme end of the row which was exactly in his line of vision. Nusillon immediately displayed a greatly diminished liking for the hymns, sang indolently, and gradually relapsed into his former dumbness. The abbé harassed him with imperative and urgent signs. This ruthlessness exasperated Nusillon, who had an instinctive and genuine repugnance against singing. But the abbé still clung to his idea and continually returned to the attack. It was thus that in a sudden access of fury at a moment when the master had just exasperated him once more, cutting right across the plainsong with a strength which he had failed to calculate, and completely upsetting the order and flow of the hymn, the boy bellowed this astonishing verse, which had come to him as a sudden inspiration: *Nusillones gentes worriaberunt Jubilem-Merdarium.* (The race of the Nusillons shall plague the foul Jubil.) After this inharmonious vociferation, the exact meaning of which was, happily, not realized, there was a general stampede of pious words; and this was followed by a blank moment of astonished silence, interrupted by the harmonium, which had lost its presence of mind, with a discordant and powerful quack.

This commotion, which provoked trouble and scandal, was the work of the impenitent Nusillon. The Abbé Jubil knew this. He had come and taken the godless child, now blushing with shame and regret, by the ear and pushed him outside; a temporary measure, which was followed by a — 10 for religious observance, a — 15 for behaviour, and a nought for his school work. The other Fathers, no less indignant, were equally severe. This was the pretty bit of work that earned Nusillon on the following Saturday his total of — 31, a total which had prompted M. Nusillon to write the comminatory letter of which the reader has already taken note.

Having read this letter at the ten o'clock recreation, Nusillon sank into a dark and sinister meditation which made him entirely

oblivious of any normal kind of scholastic activity. After his return to the classroom he proceeded, against all good sense, to write out a muddled version of twenty lines taken from the third book of the *Aeneid*. The unfortunate boy found himself quite incapable of taking any kind of interest whatsoever in the doings of the valorous Trojans while expecting the arrival at any moment of a father more formidable in his own person than the whole of that Greek army which in ancient times invaded the coasts of Asia Minor.

Nusillon was so profoundly demoralized that he did not make his usual struggle, in the refectory, to get a second helping of fried potatoes and his exact ration of prunes. During the one o'clock recreation he took a punishment of standing in a corner without looking surly over it, spending the time at the foot of his tree in reflection without trying to get hold of a ball, without throwing pebbles or continually slipping away to the privies. And it was again to meditation that he devoted the whole period of the following lesson, which got him a nought in marks without his putting up the slightest defence. The fact was that nothing mattered to him but the imminent appearance of M. Nusillon, inspired with principles in comparison with which those of Lycurgus would have been but fond caresses.

To escape this abominable encounter, with the formidable thrashing which it involved—such was Nusillon's overmastering idea. To attain this end, all his faculties, stimulated by terror, were prompting him with bold and far-reaching plans of action. Moreover, as he was saying to himself, wherever he went in the world, with whatever people he came into collision, he would never be more unhappy anywhere than in his father's company. It was horrible, but thus it was. Why, then, stand on ceremony, why be timid and prolong a state of affairs which gave him so much suffering? He turned again to his familiar plans, and particularly his pet project: to become a circus acrobat. It was from this source that he sought salvation. There was no need for Latin or Greek; to be sturdy and courageous was enough. In a circus, hands are needed. He could very well serve his apprenticeship there as a trapeze artist, and do a quantity of odd jobs to pay his way. The fact that gypsies steal children to sell them was a proof

that circuses need them; they are trained for acrobatics at an early age. If a boy came to offer himself of his own accord, doubtless they would be delighted to take him; it would be a rare windfall. There are plenty of circuses. There was almost certain to be one visiting some town not far off; he would keep an eye on the advertisements in the papers. . . .

Nusillon next wondered when his father would be coming. He knew that he was a man of prompt decisions, and that he himself would probably be given no chance of retrieving the situation by a better report. To tell the truth, Nusillon had almost given up hope of that excellent report which he was always promising and never obtained. With him, calamities which seemed somehow inevitable came and stood between the will and the deed, between a sincere wish to do what was right and his actual conduct. He would suddenly begin to fidget for no apparent reason in a way which spoiled his work; despite himself his mind wandered from his books, and when he became conscious of his own inattention it was always too late to be of any use. The boy was obliged to confess to himself that there were no effective means at his own disposal of averting the dreadful wrath which was about to descend upon him.

At the five o'clock recreation he mounted the staircase which led to the infirmary and the entertainment hall and so reached the lofts, where he joined Patafiat. He asked him:

"How much money have you got?"

"Twenty-three francs," Patafiat replied, after counting.

"And anything to eat, in your box?"

"I've got some chocolate, some nougat, some raisins, and some figs."

Nusillon made a reckoning of his own resources. With those of Patafiat included, it still made a feeble store for an adventure. Nevertheless, he put this question to him:

"How would you like to go off with me?"

"Where to?" little Patafiat asked.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. P'raps we might find a circus somewhere."

"Well, what I'd like myself," said little Patafiat, "would be to go and see my mother."

"I'll take you there. But first of all we might do a jolly fine ramble, us two. Would you like that?"

"I'd like to go and see my mother."

"Now listen to me," Nusillon said, with a sudden inspiration, "your mother loves you, does she?"

"My goodness, yes!" said Patafiat.

"She'd be frightfully sorry to lose you?"

"You bet she would!" little Patafiat said, proudly. "She'd cry her eyes out!"

"Very well, then," said Nusillon, "you just come off with me. That'll make her half-crazy, thinking you're lost, and after that she'll do just anything you want."

"Will she keep me at home?"

"Why, yes," said Nusillon, "if you threaten her that you'll go away for good and all! She'll believe you, as you'll already have gone off once."

"Do you know the way back to my mother's?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. You can ask any stationmaster."

"When do we start?" little Patafiat then asked.

"We've got to get ready," said Nusillon, "and wait for the 'special holiday,' which comes off in six days' time. On that day there's practically no one left at Sainte-Colline. We shall be able to get away at the back without anyone seeing us. And when that happens you must bring all the food you can, and so must I, and to-morrow or the day after we'll hide here, in the lofts, and wait for the day of the 'special holiday.' You'd like that?"

"Yes," said little Patafiat.

"You won't be frightened, when you've got me?"

"No," little Patafiat replied. "But I shall go and see my mother?"

"I promise you you shall!" Nusillon said.

It was a cleverly conceived plan. The "special holiday" was the designation given to an annual outing in which the whole College took part. They made for some place in the neighbourhood, with their provisions following them, and spent the day right out in the country, the two meals being eaten there. They did not return until nightfall. Punishments were suspended on these

occasions. The only people remaining at Sainte-Colline were those in the infirmary who could not walk, and the nuns, together with one or two priests left in charge of the establishment. These conditions were particularly favourable for an attempt to escape.

By making three journeys a day, the two boys transported to the loft all the hunches of bread, fruit, pieces of cheese, cold meat, and bars of chocolate that they could carry away with them. Remembering that they might be thirsty, Nusillon pilfered a watering-can, filled it at the tap in the lavatory, and carried it off and placed it with his store of food. As a precaution against cold, he seized two blankets from beds that were unoccupied, and bore them away too. Nusillon also arranged for a day-boy to bring him a large box of matches and two candles. Everything went off without a hitch, thanks to the black aprons which concealed the bulging pockets. When these preparations were complete, the two boys withdrew one evening to the lofts and did not reappear.

They were only just in time. M. Nusillon, boiling with rage, appeared at Sainte-Colline on the morning of the following day and asked for his son. The Superior hastened to receive him and informed him that the boy had disappeared since the previous day, as had also a small pupil of the Junior Division.

It must be recorded to M. Nusillon's credit that he was greatly upset by these tidings. At ordinary times he did not appear to care much for his son, but no sooner had he heard that the boy was lost than he seemed to be in despair, and began to display the greatest affection for him. There was a fine hullabaloo in that parlour, and the Superior would have been glad to sink through the floor. These words were on the tip of his tongue: "Our Fathers have prayed earnestly to Saint Anthony." He realized just in time that they would have been out of place.

"Well," M. Nusillon bellowed, anxious not to waste the anger which had been destined in the first instance for his offspring, "what have you done about it? Have the police been warned?"

"Yes, my dear sir, most certainly they have," the Abbé Fuche assured him.

In actual fact he was lying. It was shrewdness, wisdom on his

part to do so, and the reasons for it were justifiable. Still, he was lying.

It was on the previous evening at about twenty minutes past seven, in the refectory, that the masters on duty had become very anxious when they noticed the two empty places at the marble-topped tables. Not one of Nusillon's or Patafiat's fellow pupils could supply the slightest scrap of information about them. The last time they had been seen was at about the hour when the classes finished, at half-past four. It became known for certain that neither of them had been at the evening lessons. Hasty inquiries at the infirmary elicited the fact that they were not there, nor had they been seen at all. These were moments of great anxiety, and masters and pupils alike were amazed and shocked. The authorities, who were immediately informed, debated the matter in great secrecy.

Had this incident of the flight of two boys reached the ears of people outside, the effect would have been deplorable, it might have led to a supposition that certain pupils at the College were subject to ill-treatment, and the enemies of the Church (the "devourers of curés," too numerous alas! in this age of sectarianism and Masonic hostility) would not have failed to place that interpretation upon it, in order to throw discredit on the denominational establishments. Anxiety lest the scandal should be noised abroad had brought about this decision—to give the police no information of any kind until further orders, and before having exhausted every possibility of discovering the two boys who had disappeared and were supposed to have fled, but who could not have gone very far, nor escaped being seen. Several masters were sent out hurriedly to look for them, with instructions to make inquiries in the town, and even to watch (without, however, compromising the sanctity of their calling) the vicinity of the house of ill fame, for Nusillon, who was well known as a bad pupil, might well have been tempted to this adventure by a precocious propensity for vice (At Sainte-Colline, vice explained everything.)

The last of the priests who had been in search of information returned empty-handed at about two o'clock in the morning, without a single clue on which a fresh search might be based.

Here and there people had indeed spoken to them of children, but the descriptions given afforded no sort of proof that any of these were actually Nusillon and Patafiat. Others of the Fathers then took up the search, beginning at about five o'clock in the morning, after it had been agreed that neither the families nor the police should be informed.

It was shortly after this that all these precautions were nullified by M. Nusillon's unexpected appearance; and now here he was, howling at the Superior more vehemently than ever:

"Yes, well, but what have you done with my son? I've got to know!"

The Abbé Fuche made a gesture of helplessness and sorrow. He might have been on the point of replying. M. Nusillon gave him no time to do so.

"I left in your charge a child in good health, his poor mother's hope and mine. Where is that child? Show him to me, show me some trace of him . . ."

Then he added, with tragic emphasis:

" . . . or his ashes!"

"It's just some mad prank of his," the Superior suggested timidly.

"Then don't you look after your pupils?"

"All supervision may be caught napping at times. And who could ever have suspected that this pupil was getting ideas of that kind into his head?"

At this point the Spartan father became an indignant father whose indignation was stagy to a degree; and in this new part of his he was magnificently illogical, splendidly absurd.

"What sort of treatment," he cried, "has he been forced to undergo in this establishment? What is it that's been hidden from me? I want to know who has been tormenting my son."

"He has not been tormented, I assure you. And in any case, as soon as your son is found he will be restored to you."

In M. Nusillon's mind a rapid summing-up took place of the various annoyances in which such a step would involve him.

"Restored, you say—restored? Very well, then, give him back to me this very moment! Where is my son?"

"Lost somewhere or other, so it seems. . . ."

"Lost!" M. Nusillon cried out in a thunderous tone of voice. "Lost!"

"But, my dear sir, if you would just put yourself in our place. How can we know . . ."

"You are speaking like Cain, Monsieur le Supérieur. Yes, certainly, you *were* my son's keepers! Yes, I had put my child in your care—my child, the pride of a family! Yes, I was paying you to give him good principles, knowledge—and care!"

A brief parenthesis. M. Nusillon had not yet settled with the Bursar the account for the two preceding terms. The Superior remembered this, but thought it inadvisable to mention it at that moment. M. Nusillon continued, on a note of pathos:

"Where is my child? In great danger! Dead, maybe! And now, after failing to take proper care of him, you have the cheek to want to turn him out! Very well, then, I'm going to give you as good as I've got from you. I'm going straight off to lodge a complaint—to take legal proceedings."

"My dear sir . . ." said the Superior.

"And his mother! Oh, the poor saintly woman, who knows nothing about it yet!"

"My dear sir, please . . ." the Superior said again.

"How am I to tell that gentle, that devoted creature—how am I to tell her that her Hector, her darling child, who will be giving her sleepless nights with thinking about him . . . And with all the tremendous anxiety that the boy's poor mother will be having, you expect me to think twice before I bring an action against you? Before I go for damages which in any case will never be a compensation for this horrible grief?"

"Dear Monsieur Nusillon, we shall move heaven and earth to get your son back for you, safe and sound."

"Get him back for me," M. Nusillon cried out, "get him back for me, branded with the disgrace of having bolted like this—for after all, what sort of influences were they that brought him to this!—and branded with the disgrace of dismissal too! Just now you were like Cain, Monsieur le Supérieur, and now you are being Pontius Pilate."

"Then what is your wish, dear Monsieur Nusillon?"

"In the first place I want our dear little Hector found again without delay."

"We shall find him very quickly. . . ."

"After that, for him to come back to the College honourably, and have enough kindness shown him to enable him to forget the troubles which drove him to make this fatal resolve."

"To return here—my dear sir, that would be impossible, as you will understand. The example set would be deplorable. How could we explain to our pupils a pardon for so grave a misdemeanour as this?"

"Do you prefer an action, Monsieur le Supérieur?"

"My dear sir, we could always prove that the responsibility for this escape does not fall exclusively on our shoulders. . . ."

"Are you anxious to prove this in a court of law? Are you really curious to prove it?"

"I say that it would, if necessary, be quite possible to do so."

"Would you like me to come back in half an hour with two witnesses, one of whom would be my friend the sub-prefect, and ask you to give me back my son—to show him to me?"

The Superior made no reply.

"Then will you accept my conditions?" M. Nusillon asked.

"You are placing me in a horribly difficult position," the Superior said.

M. Nusillon became momentarily superb; it was the grand manner of the ancient pattern, the kind he specially admired.

"What!" he cried, "you speak of being in a horribly difficult position to a family which your negligence has plunged into heart-rending grief, and perhaps into mourning of the most dreadful kind!"

And he relapsed into silence.

Standing up, with his forearms drawn up under his cape and his hands thrust into the wide sleeves of his cassock; gazing steadily at the floor with his eyes behind their spectacles three-quarters closed, pale, slight of build, and absolutely motionless, the Abbé Fuche was buried in thought as he weighed up the whole situation. Facing him, and also standing up, but tall and heavy, with flushed face, and his calves twitching, M. Nusillon was tapping

the floor nervously with his heel. This man with his apoplectic appearance gave every impression of holding in reserve further bellowings, new threats, and of being very likely, with his obstinacy and his churlishness, to make difficulties for the College. It was certain, moreover, that if his son were dismissed he would never settle the arrears of the past six months, nor pay the fees for the current term; this would make a whole year's loss of fees. As regards an action at law, under a radical and fiercely anti-religious government it was an adventure to be avoided at all costs. When one came to think of it, there was only a month to run before the end of the year. An excuse must be found for keeping Nusillon until then, and the College could be barred to him next year. . . . This serious twist given to the regulations would at least cut out the disadvantage of a pupil with fees unpaid—unpaid for three terms. . . .

Between the man who has just unmasked all his batteries and his opponent who has not yet said anything decisive, the contest has already ceased to be on equal terms. With one thought only in his mind, in pursuit of but one single aim, the strength of the Abbé Fuche lay wholly in the same direction, for with him career, personal ambition, and religious duty were all merged in the same ideal, half-earthly and half-divine—the interests of the community.

One of the surest means of domination which the Superior possessed was the unfathomable power of his moments of silence, which baffled and disconcerted an adversary, and unnerved and alarmed him by giving him an impression of some danger which, though vague, was imminent, was closing in upon him, a danger in which all the great pontiffs of Christianity might well have a hand, for it would seem to him that this formidable little priest, mysterious, extraordinarily remote and cold, was fully equal to stirring them up against him. If M. Nusillon seemed determined to make further unseemly and scandalous clamour within the walls of the College itself—a clamour which in any case was as ineffective as it was coarse—the Abbé Fuche, whose fortunes were closely bound up with Rome and the secret Confraternities of the Church, appeared, as he stood there facing him, to be holding in reserve something mysterious, something alarming, inescapable,

for which no better definition than "a dirty Jesuit trick" could be found. It made him think. . . .

This veiled threat was already working. The deeper, the more impenetrable grew the silence which was holding these two men apart, the more conscious did M. Nusillon become of an evaporation of his self-confidence, and this began to show itself in his attitude. Still motionless, as though he were not there at all, as though an ingrained habit of prayer had then taken possession of him, the Superior, letting his subtle ecclesiastical emanations do their proper work, gave ground for the moment in order to consider the best way of retrieving a difficult situation. M. Nusillon lost patience, and made the mistake of asking:

"What do you intend to do, Monsieur le Supérieur?"

The Abbé Fuche raised his eyes almost imperceptibly, and glanced in momentary prayer at the Sacred Heart beneath a glass case which adorned the mantelpiece in the parlour:

"Nothing can be decided, dear Monsieur Nusillon, until you have seen our Bursar. And all the arrangements which we have to make must be disposed of at the same time."

M. Nusillon blushed hotly. He could never have believed that this embarrassing question would be raised at that particular moment. He felt himself threatened with the loss of a strong position, tried to regain it, but did so clumsily, and without much conviction.

"I came here to speak to you about my son. . . ."

"We are still speaking of him," the Abbé Fuche replied.

He had dropped every vestige of urbanity, and nothing remained but the excessive suavity, the distant manner of a great dignitary of the Church. He finished with these words, as he made a swift exit:

"I am going to send you our Bursar, dear Monsieur Nusillon. You will have no difficulty in settling matters with him."

In the meantime, while the College was being thrown into confusion on their account, Nusillon and Patatiat, up in the lofts, were in a state of bliss which made them quite unconscious of any dangerous element in their situation. With that marvellous faculty for unconcern which is the privilege of childhood, they

were living entirely in the present; and a brilliant morning was giving them gay and lavish encouragement.

The second fortnight of June had already arrived. It had been a late spring, and this month of June was still displaying the brightness of April and the burgeoning of May. The whole countryside was redolent with the sweet scents of flowers. To behold it would have filled you with an unreasoning and immoderate but an intoxicating joy, which came from the beauty, the serenity of all that met one's eyes, as well as from that sun which, as it rose higher and higher in a sky of heavenly blue, was bringing such hope and gladness as made you feel you trod on air. It seemed as though every thought of evil and misery and woe had fled beyond and over those gay horizons, and vanished for ever and a day. The earth seemed made for gambols, capers, frolic; it was truly a paradise whose gates were open wide to tempt two small boys who had broken loose to freedom, far from masters, far from the irksome tasks of good education, from everything that is tiresome and dull.

Thus, at least, was how the earth appeared to the two boys as they viewed it from their lofty observatory. One has to remember how schoolboys live, the restraints on their liberty, their worries and cares, in order to understand the wonder and astonishment of these two. Never before had they had such a tale of hours at their disposal, such a world of fancy and imagination within their grasp; that world now lay before them; it was their only topic, their one engrossing thought, with its medley of line and colour, its resplendent majesty. Not the least bewitching part of the adventure was this changed aspect of the surrounding country which they were discovering on every side, as they viewed it from an angle which altered all perspectives, and gave them an endless vista of hilltops and points of contact. With dirty faces indifferently washed, the two boys, enraptured, were attaining the realization of their dreams, and making in imagination long, long expeditions, with none to say them nay. They were sitting quietly like a pair of good children, close together, perched up on some old packing-cases, behind a skylight in the loft. The sun was beginning to warm the tiles above their heads, but the bracing, fresh, caressing air of those lovely spring morn-

ings was drying the perspiration on their temples and making them deliciously cool. The birds, as they passed near them swift as little arrows, uttered their brief cries, raucous or shrill, which had a weird effect. In the sky of azure blue there were a thousand different sounds, sounds as of singing, or pattering or crackling sounds, which formed an immense conglomeration of living, stirring sound. This strange medley of varied noise kept the two boys company; it was like a token of friendship held out to them by mysterious forces of this earth, this captivating earth at whose fragrant, meandering outlines they were leaning forward and gazing open-mouthed, and preparing soon to hasten away beyond them in a pursuit and conquest of happiness.

Children are not taught an understanding and love of Nature. They are allowed to remain in ignorance of that great sacred river which was created expressly for the ablutions of the soul. They are not told that the mystic festivals of the dawn have never ceased, and that each day, at its birth, brings back with it a lustral moment whose fleeting brilliance revives the virginity of those prehistoric times during which, in a whirling eddy of stars in blending, creation was still hovering on the brink. They are not taught to gain possession of the exaltation and the peace which are to be found in the mornings and evenings at the culminating point of their evolution. Is it then to be wondered at if Nusillon and Patafiat, who in the College lofts were receiving this baptism of joy, were moved and exalted thereby? Open-mouthed, hardly stirring, and sniffing away with complete unconcern, they were held fast by the lovely scene that lay before them.

"Where are we going to?" Patafiat asked.

"Over there," Nusillon answered.

He pointed to a mountain village away in the distance, half-buried in a mauve and saffron-coloured mist. The slender steeple of the church, which caught the purest of the light, was shining brightly as though it were the mast of a heavy barge submerged in this river of mist, the whole of which was gliding slowly southward. Above the village the trees parted company from each other in disorderly array like skirmishers preparing for an attack on the ridge above; then, gradually regrouping themselves, they became a dense forest, still bluish in colour over its whole extent

but showing occasional clusters of foliage of tender green. High in the heavens some small clouds were disintegrating in rose-coloured strips and fragments. These delicate tints gave to the blue of the sky a uniform, lustreless depth, which gradually lessened, with patches of lighter colour, before the line of the horizon was reached. If one looked carefully there was life everywhere. A light cart was jolting down a steep path, a sheep-dog was busy with a flock of sheep, young colts were galloping about in the meadows. And here and there were men bent forward and working on the land, with patient gestures, at tasks which one could not identify.

"Are we going to sleep outside?" Patafiat asked. "And what if it rains?"

"It won't rain for a week at least," Nusillon declared.

"Yes," said Patafiat, "but supposing it does?"

"We shall sleep in huts or sheds."

"And what about food?" Patafiat asked.

"There's any amount of things to eat in the country," Nusillon assured him.

"And the gendarmes?"

"You can be as proud as Lucifer, so long as you aren't a thief."

"And suppose they ask us what we're doing here?"

"We'll say we're brothers, and going to see our granddad. I say, are you frightened?"

"Oh no!" Patafiat said.

But there were moments when he thought of the difficulties and dangers ahead of them and did not feel entirely at his ease. Then he ceased to think of them, put his whole trust in Nusillon, and gave himself up to the pleasure of so entirely fresh, so astonishing an experience. Furthermore, in that kindly world with its radiant colouring at which they were now gazing, anything in the shape of disaster seemed highly improbable. There must be plenty of room in it for a little boy in distress who wanted to see his mother again. Such desire was not a crime. . . .

This first day was as delightful as it could possibly be. They lost all sense of time, and their joy and satisfaction were complete. They felt that they could never tire of such an existence, and that to be happy in the College lofts was natural and inevitable, so

much so that they wondered whether it would not be wiser to spend the rest of the year there in peace and quiet. But the problem of supplies was one they could not solve, and it would soon become urgent.

When they had grown tired of looking out of the windows, the two boys played a game of marbles, ate some chocolate, asked each other riddles and told some stories. They heard the bell ringing, many times, and it felt very odd not to be responding to its clanging tones, which set the establishment going. They were saying to each other: "That's for study, that's class . . ." and they pictured the other boys, with their books under their arms, setting out unenthusiastically along the corridors.

From one of the windows a portion of the Middle Division playground was visible. Keeping carefully out of sight, they spent at this window the whole of the one o'clock recreation. They recognized certain of their masters, and of their fellow pupils. It was amusing to be in this commanding position, and to see them bestirring themselves within a framework of discipline to which they themselves were no longer subject. One thing only was lacking to make their pride complete; they could not let the others know that they were hidden there, so near at hand, snapping their fingers at every rule and defying those who were searching for them.

And then the evening came, stealthily, unawares, with its purple shadows, the searing, heart-rending decline of day, when the light which falls on a myriad objects is fading to its death. The two lads, now in the grip of solitude, with desolate hearts, overcome by the air, the heat, and the inactivity of this long day, were watching night's complete and all-embracing invasion of the heavens, its engulfing of the world in its chasm of darkness, and spreading over it a pall of tremendous silence. There were tears glistening in the eyes of little Patafiat who, as will be remembered, was barely ten years old.

"Silly little ass!" Nusillon said affectionately.

He put his arm round the small boy's shoulders, led him to the corner where the blankets were spread, made him lie down, and covered him up. Soon they were both asleep, with their arms linked and their heads touching, like two devoted brothers.

The second day was not so good as the first, nor the third as good as the second. Already their pleasure was vanishing, beauty was fading, the panorama by which they had been so enraptured was meaning less to them. The two boys had talked too much to each other, and too quickly, and all their chocolate and cakes were finished. Nusillon came very near to striking Patafiat, for some piece of foolishness. There was no spitefulness in this. But boredom was beginning to assert itself, and making them feel worried and on edge. The lovely prospect which their escapade held out for them had become a less complete disguise of the harsh realities of their present situation. If it had been possible for them to rejoin their schoolfellows without causing a scene, perhaps they would have chosen this ending to their adventure. But there could be no question of it. So far as punishment went (and it would doubtless mean dismissal) it would be better to carry it through to the end.

In spite of all this they spent some pleasant hours, and the bright loveliness of the view kept them at the windows for a long time. From their observatory, they studied the route of their coming flight by branch roads. As the ordinary way out from the College was barred to them, they decided to climb the wall at the southern end of the kitchen garden, at that portion of it which was least in view, being concealed by a small hornbeam plantation. They knew that there were two ladders stored in an outhouse, underneath the refectories. It remained to be decided whether they would climb this wall by day, or stay in hiding till nightfall and await a more propitious moment then. They agreed that this could be decided on the spot. The greatest difficulty would certainly be, after leaving the lofts, to get near the place without being seen by anybody.

Nusillon was keeping up Patafiat's courage; during the course of the third day the little boy began to complain a good deal. He had caught cold on the previous night. The cold had affected his delicate eye, which was becoming inflamed. A fresh stye would have been in the nature of a disaster. . . . It must be added that the provisions, which had not been sufficiently economized, were now coming to an end. And for three days, during which time they had had no hot food of any kind, they had been sleeping on

the dusty boards of the loft. This debilitating mode of life was rather disheartening them.

The whole weight and responsibility of the escapade was bearing on Nusillon more heavily than ever, but even so the little boy's company meant a great deal to him. Finally, thoughts of the paternal thumpings (with him, it always came back to that) gave him the will to persevere. Towards the evening of the last day he succeeded in making Patafiat laugh. This laugh dispelled every worry and care, and sleep had welcomed them with open arms while there was still a little daylight left in the sky.

The great day arrived. The bell, which rang as usual, drew one and all from their beds at five o'clock in the morning. The sun was already shining. Nusillon and Patafiat also rose, poured a little water from the can on to their handkerchiefs and hurriedly washed their faces. They then stationed themselves at a window, in order to keep a careful watch on what would soon be happening down below, and to be prepared for any eventuality. A little after seven o'clock sounds of a great trampling of feet warned them that the College was making a start; and they saw the three Divisions assembling in the main courtyard. The doors were opened, and the pupils passed through the iron gates in a flowing stream which did not cease until the last boy had gone. They were followed by two large carts with the provisions. The moment at which the two boys were to stake everything to win all was now approaching. . . .

The hour of midday seemed to them to be the best suited to their purpose (the small number of staff left behind in charge would be having their meal). They decided to wait until then. It was a long and desperately anxious time. They had no more food and were beginning to suffer from hunger. They had collected everything for their departure when the hour struck.

Nusillon was in front, listening for every sound, glancing in every direction to see how the land lay and spurting forward at intervals. Patafiat followed, having to move at all the speed of which he was capable in order to keep up with him. Their hearts were racing and they could scarcely breathe. It was splendid weather, and very hot. The sun, at his zenith, beat down merci-

lessly, his rays penetrating freely into the empty, silent rooms of the College.

The two boys went down the main staircase leading to the linen-room in their socks, having hidden their shoes in their blouses in order to keep the hands free. The combination of heat and terror was making them perspire freely beneath their long capes, and the wide beret which was hiding their faces. The crude, blinding light added to their fears. The air seemed alive, filled with mysterious, terrifying sounds, which were like whis-pers, or light rustling contacts, or sneering chuckles. Twice, thinking they were seen, the boys dashed back again half-way up to the story above. The second time it happened, the clumsy, idiotic little Patafiat went sprawling on the stair. He had hurt himself, and the skin was slightly grazed. To prevent him from crying, and perhaps making considerable noise, Nusillon had to rub his knee and tie it up with a handkerchief on which the victim had previously spat. This mishap lost them some precious minutes, and was also a handicap, for when he started off again Patafiat was limping slightly. A bad member of so dangerous an expedition! Patafiat was one of those lymphatic children whose moods, constantly changing, call for a daily dose of cod-liver oil. "A bit of a softie!" thought Nusillon, who had been trained at an early age for the endurance of hardship by his father's energetic methods. But the die had been cast! They had started on this flight together, and together they must continue it.

On the other hand, just because he was fragile and weakly, little Patafiat showed a certain heroism. His confidence in the elder boy and readiness to obey him were admirable. The devotion of the subordinate sustains the leader, whose valour carries the subordinate along with him. And thus it was that, all things considered, Nusillon and Patafiat were not such a bad combination of little adventurers given over to wild fancies. To get beyond the peristyle, to reach the steep little slope which abutted on the Middle Division playground, to get past that playground, the covered gymnasium and Father Bricole's hut, and take refuge provisionally behind a hedge of the kitchen garden, not far from the shed where the ladders were kept,—all this was an undertaking for which speed and temerity were worth more than prudence,

for the fugitives would at several places be exposed to view. Bent almost double, the two lads charged along, goaded by their terror. Nusillon, the faster of the two, ran in front, with Patafiat following him, and limping. This continued for possibly two or three minutes, but those minutes were utterly exhausting. Finally, they collapsed behind the hedge, gasping for breath, with their heads buzzing, wet with perspiration, and with their legs giving way beneath them. They seemed to hear furious voices shouting their names, an avenging crowd galloping at their heels. Heated and flushed, looking wild and dishevelled, their faces besmeared with dirt soaked in sweat, the appearance of each one was enough to frighten the other. For some considerable time they remained lying down, unable to speak, and with their tongues protruding, like a pair of young dogs utterly played out. Then, after that, they were filled with a sense of tranquillity and peace, the heat enwrapped and soothed them, and the College clock, with little silvery notes, struck a quarter to one. From the buildings, benumbed and asleep amid this all-pervading torpor, not a sound came forth. Wherever they looked, they could see no trace of humanity. What should they do?

They began taking stock of the situation, or rather Nusillon did so, for any initiative to be shown or decisions to be taken rested entirely with him, Patafiat being quite unequal to such a task. Why not take advantage of this somnolence everywhere—so the elder boy was thinking—and make their attempt immediately? The longer they waited the more dangerous would their situation become. Seen from a distance, the kitchen garden looked like an inextricable tangle of shrubs and plants. But he had not forgotten that all these natural objects were in fact planted in rectilinear rows, and were thus entirely lacking in such cover as would offer a safe refuge for two schoolboys in their dark capes. Any stray passer-by could easily make them out, and if they moved they would be discovered. To face all risks without further delay was evidently the wisest course. . . . At that moment the clock struck a quarter past one.

"Come behind me," said Nusillon to Patafiat.

They crept along until they reached the hedge. From there, beneath the shed about twenty yards away, they could see the two

ladders laid out, a very long one which looked endless, and another and shorter one, covered with white plaster, which would suit them perfectly. At the last moment Nusillon allowed himself to pause. He had to settle final details in order to act quickly without making the slightest mistake. Then it struck half-past one, and there was no time to be lost.

"Shall we go?" Nusillon asked.

"It's what you want," Patafiat answered.

They crawled towards the ladders like a pair of Sioux Indians.

A ladder, that instrument which bestrides and partitions empty space, is a mere trifle at first sight, especially if it is only a small ladder ten or twelve feet long, a ladder for picking cherries or washing window-panes. To set it up, to climb it—either is mere child's play.

But when that ladder becomes an instrument of freedom, a means of escape, a burden which has to be transported while the carriers keep out of sight, a burden entrusted to two schoolboys, one of whom has barely passed his tenth birthday, it becomes a different matter altogether. We have now to picture to ourselves the two boys, Nusillon and little Patafiat (the latter limping!) with large drops of perspiration, obliged to halt every few yards, hauling this wretched ladder across a kitchen garden roasted in the blazing summer heat, while behind them there is a large building of three stories with fifty windows directed like telescopes on their escapade, and each of which may be concealing imminent peril. (And, indeed, each is doing so in the boys' thoughts, and they are conscious of fifty pairs of eyes fixed upon them and watching their manœuvre.) We have also to remember that that devilish ladder is knocking against little Patafiat's legs and overwhelming him with its weight, because, when carried at full length, it imposes a greater effort on the smaller of the two boys. We must remember, too, that the ladder is not only too heavy for him, but also much too thick for Patafiat's small hands. What happens now was always bound to happen. Patafiat loosens his hold, stumbles and falls. He already had a bad eye; he had hurt his knee, and now his elbow. He had become a regular cripple. And this comes about at the most critical moment of the day, right under those accursed windows!

Over both boys there comes a wave of discouragement, a feeling that it is useless to prolong their struggle against a hostile Fate. But Nusillon recovers quickly. He will not be beaten. He looks at the wall, observes the spot at which they must clear it. He sees in imagination, behind it, the vast open spaces of the countryside, the villages making gay patches of colour, the exciting towns with their crowds of people and their unlimited resources, and in one of these towns a circus blazing with lights and surrounded by gaping onlookers, and smelling of wild beasts, horses, acetylene, and machinery. Beneath the awning, at an impressive height, the performers on the trapeze are hurled into space. The orchestra suddenly stops, the audience holds its breath. . . . The man in tights flies off, making a wild curve in the air, and seizes the other trapeze as it were by a miracle: there is frantic applause. This is Nusillon's true destination, the only place where his father will not come to seek him.

Very well, then! Come what may, a leader must be capable of taking every risk. There is a time for being careful and a time for being bold. The two boys harness themselves to the ladder and drag it along like a harrow, which wreaks havoc among the flower-beds, crunches on the gravel, and raises clouds of dust. Let the heavens fall! The wall is only just ahead, the plantation likewise. A few more steps, a final heave . . . Panting, breathless, they throw themselves to the ground. But they are still holding the precious ladder, they are holding it clasped in their arms. In a few minutes they will be over the wall, they will be outside the College.

"Hi, there, you boys! Well, that's a nice thing! And what are they doing there, those little ruffians!"

Father Bricole has seized Nusillon by the ankle; he is on the point of getting over the wall, while Patafiat, who has only climbed the first few rungs, begins trembling in every limb.

A few minutes ago Father Bricole was needing the ladder for some repairs. Not finding it by the shed, he had said to himself: "They must have left it over there, the careless beggars!" thinking of some builders who had been there recently. He had begun a search for his ladder in a leisurely sort of way, at the same time

looking at the flowers he loves and making sure that the fruit-trees are in good order. Just as he is examining the branches of a pear-tree he sees, a few yards away, the top of his ladder being moved by invisible hands, and making a hesitating curve against the background of the sky, precariously poised as though it were going to fall back again, and then finally coming to rest with a bump against the top of the wall. Who on earth could be handling that ladder on a day when the College is deserted, and handling it in that strange manner? He must go and see.

Father Bricole does not know *Patafiat*, of the Junior Division. But he knows *Nusillon* well, the boy having come several times to take refuge in his hut. Without letting go of his leg, he cries out:

"Upon my word! Did you ever see such a thing! So it's you, is it? We've been looking for you all over the place for the last three days, and now there you are, perched up there like a tom-cat! Come along now. You'll fall and hurt yourself!"

There is an intonation of benevolence and goodness in the voice that is irresistible: it has a softening, disarming effect. Had he been startled by tones of rage and fury, *Nusillon* would doubtless make a struggle and strive by every possible means to get clear, even to the extent of jumping down on the other side, where he would have every chance of being killed; for he does not know that at this point the wall of the kitchen garden rests upon a retaining-wall, and that the top of it lies about sixteen feet above the meadow beneath. In this desperate undertaking, *Nusillon* would perhaps risk breaking a limb and throw himself down headlong, if those accents of friendship were not now taking away all his spirit of determination at the very moment when a few seconds will make the whole difference to his fate. The forces of rebellion are conquered by this voice which is foreshadowing kind treatment. He has nothing more to do but to climb down again, to give himself up.

"Well, my young friends, you brought it here, so now you will help me to carry it back again!", Father Bricole says gently.

He is speaking of the ladder. He himself has lifted it up at one end, and he makes the boys do the same at the other, and carry it, moving ahead of him. It is a sorry little procession, this, in a

school kitchen garden, at about two o'clock in the afternoon in the pitiless light of a blazing sun!

The ladder is put back, very carefully, in its place by the shed. This simple action marks the passing of a dream. It is then that nerves give way, pride hauls down its flag. Two bold adventurers, a circus acrobat and an inventor, are now no more than guilty schoolboys, and they burst into tears.

"You've had nothing to eat?"

They shake their heads. Father Bricole leads them to his hut and shuts them up there, while he goes off to seize anything he can find in the way of catables in the refectory and the kitchens, without saying a word to anybody. He is very soon back again, loaded with provisions, which even include some dainties. He makes the two boys eat. It is a delightful moment for them, bringing them rest and consolation. And the rest will last for several solid hours yet, for the whole College is roaming over the countryside.

Father Bricole had this remark on the tip of his tongue: "What a state you are in, my poor children!" What he meant was—"so dirty, so tattered, so weary." But he refrained. He thought that they were more touching in that condition, with that look of having suffered. But he was in doubt as to what sort of fate was in store for the two culprits—bad enough, in all probability; nor did he know exactly on what lines he would intercede for them; from the very first moment the idea of interceding for his prisoners had been in his mind. He was feeling a little sorry that he had stopped them, but having caught them—though very much against his will!—it became his duty to keep them back. And in any case where would they have gone to, the poor lads?

Father Bricole's amazing freshness and innocence of mind enabled him always to remain, despite his age, on a footing of equality with children. He was the only adult in the College who really understood them, who took what is a serious matter with them—their troubles—seriously, acting on the principle that the scale of their pains and griefs is as great as they can bear; for at each stage of its existence humanity has its full meed of pain. He believed that the sorrows of children which have been

undeserved, or which others have failed to understand, may corrupt their hearts and minds because these are more sensitive, more easily hurt than with grown-up people; and that the impressions of childhood, once they have been firmly implanted, remain throughout those children's lives and constitute their emotional background. He believed that in nearly every child there is some precious and tender element which may either germinate or else wither and die; but that it is not by means of stern, forbidding methods, of dry and rigid teaching, that one may tap this source of wealth. He did not think of what is generally known as "childish" as being either inferior or foolish, but rather as based on motives of which adults with their blind egotism are entirely unconscious. He believed that there are numbers of children who, from lack of opportunity for opening their hearts, never blossom or expand at all, that many fine qualities in them are spoilt by fear, and that where children generally are concerned, people fail in their duty towards them. It should be added that he did not analyse all this so much as we have done here. With him it was a matter of feeling, for he himself had remained simple, pure, and free from envy, a grown-up child who, no less than other children, was afraid of men, of their spite, their malice, and their pitiful concert.

Smiling gently as he watched Nusillon and Patafiat, Father Bricole was pondering over the situation. The flight of these two boys, now weary and in a pitiful condition, and in reality so anxious despite their pleasant prattle like the chirping of little birds, had been due to causes which lay far below the surface and were probably grievous. Quite soon he would be handing them over to the authorities, having no choice in the matter. Should he do so unconditionally? No, this was not what he had in mind. The hearts of children are filled with burdensome secrets, secrets not far removed from tragedy. He wanted to know what was the secret of those two boys, to enable him to defend them better when everyone else would be against them. He knew that the truth and justice of God, in the case now before him, were to be found in something as far removed as could be from the strict application of a rule.

Looking at them as they chattered and munched away joyfully,

Father Bricole was hesitating to spoil their gladness. He decided nevertheless, that he must do so.

"Well," he said suddenly, "you two have been up to some fine tricks! What made you do it?"

The boys said not a word. They had been touched at their tenderest spot. With their suspicions aroused, instinctively they withdrew into themselves. It is not only suffering that may be terrible, but also the wondering whether such suffering is not in itself a shameful matter; this is a question which forsaken children are continually asking themselves. Nevertheless, Nusillon and Patafiat saw, in the frank, open gaze of Father Bricole, a gleam of encouragement so bright that they felt they would never have a better chance to unbosom themselves; and this they were yearning to do. Nothing now but natural shyness was holding them back.

Then each boy made use of the other by speaking on *his* behalf.

"It's because of his mother . . ." said Nusillon.

"It's because of his father . . ." said Patafiat.

"His mother doesn't want to see him any more," said Nusillon.

"His father beats him too much . . ." said Patafiat.

"He used to be crying all the time . . ." said Nusillon.

"He was too frightened . . ." said Patafiat.

And now from each boy there came flowing streams of words.

Each was relating minutely the other's troubles, with an intensity derived from his own afflictions and an abundance of detail which he would not have dared to give in speaking of his own affairs. Patafiat was giving an excellent account of the Nusillons, the bullying father and the whining, spineless mother. Nusillon was describing M. Aufraide with indignation as the tormentor of a pretty woman and a defenceless child. It was all a confused mass of relationships and abominations in which the good Father Bricole completely lost his way, such confusion was there, in the vehemence of these intersecting accounts, between the cruelties of one family and those of the other. He let these torrents flow before directing their course. It was the first onrush, which had been held too long in check, and the two boys were now opening the sluices wide.

Later both these stories were retold from beginning to end. And thus it was that Father Bricole made the acquaintance of two bourgeois families in which individual characters and passions counted for much, so much indeed as to affect the minds of two schoolboys profoundly and seriously. These boys were now recounting their flight with some little self-satisfaction. Their exploit was taking on a heroic aspect of which they were not a little proud. . . . This pride may well be forgiven them, seeing that it was the sole advantage that their enterprise had brought them, an advantage which was very far from being a compensation for the punishments which loomed threateningly ahead. The boys explained how they had met and become friends, how they had discovered the lofts, their accumulation of a stock of food, and how they had lived for three days. Father Bricole laughed heartily. He could see nothing naughty in all this. On the contrary, he felt moved to tenderness and pity as he listened to the plans of a future trapeze artist and an inventor who, at this end of a day which had been packed with varying emotions, could now barely manage to keep awake. At about seven o'clock with no one taking any notice of him, little Patafiat fell asleep on his bed of wood shavings. Nusillon said to Father Bricole, in the affectionate, bantering tone of one who is taking care of a weaker vessel:

"Look, Father, he's asleep!"

And two minutes later he himself closed his eyes and fell asleep too, lying close against his frail companion in misfortune.

In his hut where the light was now fading, Father Bricole was gazing sadly at the two exhausted lads who had gone to sleep with such complete confidence in him. This touching confidence made him their protector; and indeed, they had none but him to defend them, even a little, with everything and everybody against them. In sleep, which may hand him over defenceless to the most searching examination, the human being's features may shadow forth the innermost recesses of his soul. The two clear, open faces, with lips slightly parted, were radiant with uncontaminated innocence and youth, and if there were something imperceptible by which their expression was altered, it was the presence of some

haunting, painful memory which still lingered in these children's dreams.

Father Bricole had taken out his rosary, and was automatically slipping the beads through his fingers. But he was addressing a prayer to Heaven with definite intention: "Dear God," he was murmuring, "I simply must get these little people out of this mess! They are in very great trouble, that's their whole story. But will they make any effort to understand, those others?" The others . . . that is to say, the Superior and the Vice-Principal, those responsible for discipline, those who coldly carried out the provisions of a ready-made code, taking no account of special cases. It is easy enough to condemn. What is difficult, as well as charitable and humane, is to understand. It is forgiveness that is meritorious—that, and trying to find out who deserves forgiveness. . . .

Such were the thoughts of Father Bricole, rosary in hand, as night was falling. He was feeling frightened of the part of mediator which chance was allotting him. Not that he knew not what to say, that his heart and mind were not well filled with arguments and proofs; but he feared lest his recommendation should actually do these children harm (he was never on the right side of the barricade, circumstances never placed him among those in authority, those who consider themselves the "just and righteous"). For once in his life he was deploring the fact that he did not possess the cleverness and self-assurance of men who have brilliant careers. Not for his own benefit, God knew! But for saving Nusillon and Patafiat—just that. With this task accomplished, he would be glad to return to his workman's hovel, with no more pride, no more ambition than he had before. Patching things up, doing odd jobs—such was his part in life. He wished for nothing better, provided only that some opportunity for doing a little good came his way sometimes. The poor and the feeble he dearly loved.

Night had completely fallen when a confused, rumbling noise announced the return of the Divisions, and the College, with its occupants suddenly restored to it, resumed its ordinary life.

The old priest folded his rosary and left his hut, securely locking the door behind him. He slipped the key into his pocket. It

was a lovely starry night. He threw a glance at the heartening display in the heavens, made a wide sweeping sign of the Cross, and said to himself:

"Well, old Father Bricole, let us go and visit our fine gentlemen!"

He began looking around for the Superior, and found him at the door of his room. He entered, saying as he did so:

"I have heard something of Nusillon and Patafiat,"

"Have they been found? Where are they?"

"They are quite all right, for the moment."

"Are they far from here?"

Father Bricole made no reply to this question.

"Father," he said, boldly and firmly, "I am only the humble Father Bricole, a peasant, a workman priest."

"Oh, but," the Abbé Fuche said kindly, "you do plenty of work here."

"Yes, with my hammer, my saw, my soldering lamp, I do what I can, and I don't grudge my trouble. But to-day there is something more I have to do. I have got an opportunity for doing a great service to two little Christians, in whom there is no evil at all. Father, I am going to tell you the stories of Nusillon and of Patafiat."

M. Aufrade was one of those men, happily not often found, whose sole motive in every act of theirs is passion, and who, where there is no passion involved, are useless people, for so far as they are concerned monotony, or even peace, are things far more terrible, far more depressing than funerals. It was principally the passion of love which had played an important and, all things considered, a destructive part in his life.

The infatuations of M. Aufrade occurred at five-yearly intervals. Regularly at about this interval of time he met "the woman of his life." This, on each occasion, was a new and catastrophic intoxication in that the impatient lover liquidated the whole of his past in one fell swoop, threw overboard people, homes, situations, and circumstances without a moment's hesitation or a vestige of remorse, and started all over again on a new adventure with which previous ones bore no comparison, an adventure

which he sincerely believed to be final, and which never was. And which never would be, one might even think, for it was a logical conclusion to suppose that M. Aufrade, having met and deserted several women in his life, would not stop there, and that inevitably the most glorious, the most irresistible creatures would disclose themselves to him sooner or later.

Whatever the future held in store, one thing was always certain. When once all dangers, resistances, pathetic oaths, heart-rending interviews were over and done with, M. Aufrade, having now come down to earth, would soon be finding dull, if not wholly insipid, the lady whom for several months past he had worshipped as a goddess, and on whose account he had turned families topsy-turvy in frenzied fashion and without a qualm, trodden on the conventions, and brought despair or mourning to many hearts. Scenes of high tragedy, of frenzied emotion were all he cared for. Hectic thrills, excitement, pallor, tired eyes—those were the things he needed to see. Bewildered, distracted mistresses were the only ones he wanted: and he wanted them to live through him, by him, for him.

No sooner were his feelings aroused by some fresh charmer than he rushed to conquer her, and devoted the whole of his time to besieging her, monopolizing her, casting a spell upon her. He must have possession of her body, her inmost feelings, her thoughts and ideas, without a memory, without an opinion, without even a voluntary omission with which he was unfamiliar. He made the beloved dizzy, he hypnotized her, annihilated her.

Then at last she would become his, completely his, as he had wished that she should be. At last he had branded her, as with a red-hot iron, with his own devouring personality. Then, later, he would discover that there is always some insufficiency in human beings, that they cannot recover lost prestige, and that there was no woman on earth capable of dispelling the innate boredom by which his gloomy and self-centred nature was flooded. With this idea in his mind he would live in philosophical resignation, gradually losing interest in his companion, and believing himself to be heartily sick of his sentimental enterprises, until the day when next there swam into his vision some new

ravishing creature who straightway plunged him into a whirlpool of wild hopes, tumultuous feelings, disorder, and devastation.

After ten months of marriage, M. Aufralde had arrived at the stage when, having wrought all his usual havoc, his main object was to free himself from the trammels of his passion. He had to look facts in the face: the fifth "woman of his life" was merely a disappointment, one more mistake on his part, a mistake brought about by a repression of feeling spread out over the long, solitary, and too peaceful period which had preceded his meeting with Eliane. M. Aufralde alternated between fits of amorous hunger and intervals of time lasting several months—or several years ("the only productive bits of my life," he used to think, when they were over), during which his whims and fancies, anything that aroused his curiosity and interest in his work were the only things that counted. The one thing certain—and he always harked back to this—was that a woman for ever hanging on to his coat-tails was not in his line at all. But the trouble was that he was a born seducer, the perfect lover, fiery, impetuous, thoughtful, and full of delicate attentions, and women could not grow tired of him. It was he who grew tired of them. As soon as the woman for whose conquest he had expended such efforts had become his mistress and was under his domination, he would say to himself: "Why do I do it? To hear the same little dove-like cooings all over again, to prove to myself that every one of them makes the same effort to monopolize us and bring us down to her own level. It's just a waste of one's time!"

But it is easier to seduce than it is to get rid of an enraptured woman. And Eliane, who for so long had held back, and had been a little sceptical at first—who in their liaison, and later in their marriage, had expected only some transitory pleasure—was now saying to herself that this love of hers would mean life or death to her.

It will now be easily understood how M. Aufralde, delighted at finding an occupation for his wife entirely unconnected with himself, was far from displeased at the arrival of a letter from Sainte-Colline which announced that young Robert Patafiat, having been guilty of a serious misdemeanour, was about to be restored to his family.

"Very well, then," M. Aufraide said, quite calmly, "you will be having your son with you. We will send him to school as a day-boy. That is what will suit him best. The child can't do with a boarding-school."

"But," said Mme Aufraide, who was fearing least the return of her son should involve an estrangement from her husband, "didn't you say last year that boarding-school life was the only one that produced brilliant and successful pupils?"

"Oh yes, certainly," M. Aufraide said, "when it's a case of a headstrong, self-willed boy who has to be made manageable. But your son has a tender disposition."

"But didn't you tell me," Mme Aufraide replied, "that boys with that kind of disposition want hardening, and that this is doing them a service?"

M. Aufraide, thank heaven, was not a man to be embarrassed by his own contradictions, and was well able to combat opposing arguments with wise, carefully weighed, and irrefutable ones of his own. He answered:

"Yes, darling, I agree that there are certain soft and effeminate natures that need to be hardened. But your son has an affectionate, tender nature, which is not at all the same thing. When you get natures like that, it becomes one's duty to be careful not to spoil either their freshness or their sensibility. On the whole, in Robert's own interest—and I have got to know him better now—I am not sorry for the way this has turned out. The child shall be a day-boy. He will be all the better for having an eye kept on him at home, besides which he will be keeping you company, Eliane. And then, you know, it's not a very good thing to separate children from their mothers. It certainly doesn't help family affection. I don't think that enough attention is paid to the family nowadays, and that is a mistake, for the family is the basis of society. When families break up, everything falls to pieces in a country."

M. Nusillon had not ceased to persecute the Abbé Fuche with a series of frightful telegrams, at the rate of at least three daily, during the whole time that his son was missing. He took himself very seriously in this new role of the father in despair. This, how-

ever, did not prevent him from blowing up Mme Nusillon severely, she being readier to shed tears and more swollen-eyed than ever, and shouting at her: "Look at that son of yours! He'll end up like your brother, that villain Eugène!"

M. Nusillon excelled in playing a double game which enabled him to pose as a martyr wherever he went. On the one hand this sorry individual considered that his hearth and home were being contaminated by the tainted blood of the Mortifioux. On the other, he had started a fight with the College from which he fully expected to derive some profit in the form of compensation (for loss of paternal enjoyment and privilege) and consequent reduction of the amount of his still outstanding debts for school fees. He was taking these two attitudes at the same time, expecting to gain something from each. At home, poor Mme Nusillon, despairing of ever being forgiven for the essential inferiority of her own lineage, was attending to the wants of her lord and master with the zeal and devotion of a slave. At Sainte-Colline—well, anything might happen . . .

A telegram from the College arrived at last, informing M. Nusillon that his son had been recovered and was safe and sound. He was invited to come and see for himself that the boy was in perfect health. M. Nusillon started off on his journey in a state of considerable mental confusion. He had to try and imagine himself as a father making a display of gushing tenderness and shedding tears of joy at the restoration of his lost child, and in addition to this, he would have to manage cleverly in order to obtain the most satisfactory settlement possible of the financial question, in other words, to combine emotion with a sound business instinct, a mixture the production of which would call for adroitness and skill.

When the door opened of the little parlour into which M. Nusillon had been shown on his arrival at the College, it was neither the Superior nor his own son who entered. It was the portly Abbé Ragraton who appeared, looking thoroughly cheerful and good-natured, and bringing with him powerful exhalations of white wine. The Bursar went straight to the point, with a briskness that was at the same time coaxing and persuasive:

"So, dear Monsieur Nusillon," he said as he unfolded his state-

ments of accounts, "we are going to settle our little business straight away. It comes to 856 francs and a few centimes."

M. Nusillon knew that total only too well! But he was greatly astonished at finding that things were not turning out at all in the way he had anticipated. He felt like having a dispute with that artful dodger the Abbé Ragraton who at first sight didn't seem to have much mischief in him.

"I have come to see my son, Mr. Bursar. That is what I am principally concerned about."

"Yes, of course, my dear sir. He will be coming along directly we have fixed matters up."

"And to see the Father Superior."

"He was extremely sorry when he had to go away, and asked me to give you his apologies. The Archbishop sent for him this morning on some very urgent matter."

M. Nusillon realized that he was up against an ecclesiastical stratagem, that he would be met by silence everywhere, that obstacles would be put in his way and that he would see nobody. In spite of all this he wanted to put up a fight, to make something out of it, a hundred francs, fifty . . . He looked at the accounts.

"Eight hundred and fifty-six francs," he said. "that was before what has just happened. But since then, through the fault of the College, I have been put to some expense: there have been journeys, telegrams, and what not too, all of which have made me lose an enormous amount of time. . . ."

"We have certainly not forgotten all that, my dear Monsieur Nusillon," the Abbé Ragraton said kindly. "And that indeed is the reason why we have not taken into account the expenses which we ourselves have incurred in all the search we have had to make. . . . And they amount to a considerable sum!"

"But your responsibility . . ." M. Nusillon said.

"That is a point which we might go on discussing for ever, and we should only be wasting our time. And now, what about the boy . . . shall we be keeping him?"

As he said this, the Abbé Ragraton pushed over his papers in an encouraging and at the same time decisive manner.

"I had better receipt these bills for you, hadn't I?"

"All right, M. Nusillon said, curtly. "I will make you out a cheque."

"Splendid!" the Abbé Ragraton said, in a soothing tone of voice. "You see, my dear sir, what one owes remains owing, but once it is paid off it's paid for good and all, and it's a most pleasant relief. It is difficult to forget what one owes, but you soon forget the money you've paid in discharging a debt."

He took the cheque, examined it carefully, and folded it.

"The boy shall come along at once," he said as he retired, looking thoroughly cheerful. And he opened his tobacco pouch.

M. Nusillon was red in the face and boiling with rage of an explosive intensity. He had been flouted. He had nothing to record but disillusion and disappointments, this last of which had been a severe blow to his pride: he had been scored off badly. Yes, that fat, broken-winded priest, with his grog-blossoms and his greasy cassock, that oily, abominable Ragraton had just indisputably scored off him! What had brought it about? Whose fault was it? The old, everlasting grievance naturally occurred to him: his hatred of the Mortifioux. All these annoyances were due to his son, that miserable little idiot who had inherited from his mother the repulsive instincts of her execrable family!

It was then that the guilty schoolboy, the deplorable, the shameful hero of the — 31 marks, made his pitiful entrance. There was emphatically no question of killing the fatted calf in *his* honour! And Nusillon, for his part, had certainly never supposed that his father, by some miraculous transformation, would give him a joyful welcome. Accordingly, when the door was closed behind him, foreseeing that this meeting could hardly fail to begin with a formidable box on the ears, Nusillon remained cautiously out of reach. He had that hopelessly dull, besotted look which so exasperated M. Nusillon, whose forbidding, stern appearance immediately reduced his son to a condition of paralysing stupidity. Their relations with each other were completely unchanged. Father and son were finding each other exactly as they had been before. The old feelings which they had always had were laying hold of them with relentless force, a force inherent in the hereditary ties by which, bringing misery to the son

and arousing fury in the father, they were mutually bound—with this difference, that the boy's hateful moral inheritance had actually come to him through his father, and that he would have been justified in saying to him: "An idiot, am I?—and whose fault is that?" It was very likely the logical possibility of this question that was so greatly exasperating M. Nusillon as he looked at that small face which, stupid though it was, had nevertheless been modelled by Nature to resemble his own. There were, indeed, some slight modifications due to the Mortifioux strain, but there was also something authentically, unmistakably Nusillon inscribed, with indelible emphasis, in the features of the terrified boy. This obvious resemblance put the finishing touch to the father's wrath. Pointing to the floor at a place within easy reach of his powerful, avenging hand, he thundered out:

"Come here, you little blockhead!"

Nusillon, with his elbows stuck out and ready for the ceremony, walked slowly to his punishment, his torture.

But at that moment the door opened and admitted an ungainly little priest who, to M. Nusillon's great astonishment, came and stood between him and his son, without saying a word to explain his presence. This queer little priest looked at M. Nusillon with a gaze so clear and steady and penetrating as to be unbearable, and in some strange way it made him blush.

"Why don't you love him?" he said, gently.

"What business is that of yours?" M. Nusillon answered rudely.

"Only love can save," the little priest declared. "I have come to remind you of that."

"Who sent you?" M. Nusillon asked, with a snarl.

"He who said: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

That clear gaze, without a touch of hatred in it, held M. Nusillon motionless; he could not move, and an entirely unaccustomed feeling of embarrassment overcame him. The little priest took advantage of this and turned to the trembling schoolboy, who was waiting for his fate to be decided.

"Go, Nusillon," he said, "go back to your lessons, and come again often and see me. God will not fail to help you, because He always takes pity on the innocent. Go, little Nusillon, and

peace be with you. I am going to tell your father some things he should know."

And thus it was that little Patafiat was restored to his mother, never again to be parted from her, and that Nusillon, during the fortnight of his worst report and his attempt to escape, was not beaten by his father. These two obscure miracles—with their far-reaching consequences—must be placed to the credit of Father Bricole who, having wrought them, returned in all humility to his hovel and shut himself up therein.

CHAP X AND NOW, MY DEAR CHILDREN . .

"LADIES and gentlemen, Fathers, and you, my dear children—the year has now reached its end, the school year, which is the only one that really counts in this our little city of education, of good and righteous knowledge, and of solid Christian principles: the only one which counts in this establishment, where everything is done within God's sight and in conformity with His law, since to return one day to Him with a tale of good deeds is the aim and object of us all.

"Our common task, my dear children, comes to an end this day, that task which always has been and always will be based upon the willing collaboration of the kind people of all ages assembled here. I should like you all, at this moment of our dispersal, to have a sure and certain feeling that those who for the past nine months have been your masters, are your friends, and that they have never ceased to be your friends, despite the occasional harshness which is a necessary adjunct of the teaching profession; despite the obligation laid upon them to teach you to respect a discipline which, in its enforcement, has at times weighed as heavily on them as upon yourselves. It is with the recollection of this deep-seated, this useful friendship—to what extent it bears these qualities you will discover for yourselves later on—that I

should like us to be parting to-day. Let us separate on terms of mutual friendship, each one of us with a full realization of what he owes to others."

That longed-for day, the 18th July 1913, was in fact, the concluding day of the school year. The trunks were packed and already conveyed to the station. All that now remained, before the doors of the main courtyard were opened wide, was to proceed to the solemn distribution of prizes.

In the entertainment hall, standing before the lowered curtain on the stage, the Superior was making his annual speech for the closure. Below him, seated on two rows of chairs, were the Fathers, clad in their very best cassocks. They all wore the same serious expression suitable to the occasion, that distinctive expression generally associated with ecclesiastical meditation, but with a large admixture of serene and kindly benevolence. Behind the Fathers the three Divisions in uniform, Junior, Middle, and Senior, in that order, occupied their usual benches. Lastly, behind the regular occupants of the College, on chairs specially reserved for them, were the pupils' families in their smartest clothes.

As space was limited, at the back of the hall one saw men in morning dress, fathers of pupils, who remained standing, with their arms folded and listening attentively. The majority of them were slightly bald, with beards, and that worthy and respectable portliness which gives a man additional weight in the affairs of this life. Long since delivered from the restless mood, the sudden impulse, the rather wild ambition of youth, with their aims in life attained or on the way to attainment and their careers definitely and finally shaped, they were now in full enjoyment of the enviable circumstances of their maturer years, a period during which their only care was to endanger none of those interests and advantages which they had acquired by dint of much perseverance, while occasionally disowning the dreams of their early youth, the memory of which had all but vanished. Henceforth they would be only fathers, that is, living examples supplied by Nature, and in complete agreement with the best religious and civic teaching. This part that they had to play did not alarm them. Fortified by their experience of life and rendered self-confident by their

obvious success, they felt quite equal to teaching their wayward and fanciful children that wise and prudent choice which should unhesitatingly be made between an uncertain, equivocal, and barely honourable aim in life, and some form of work of a less fanciful and safer nature, which soon assures a tractable and hard-working young man a good place in society. The attractions of adventure, the lure of poetry, a taste for independence, a marriage for love, a passion for difficult undertakings—all those delights were illusory ideals by which they too had been ensnared in days gone by, but of which they had managed to rid themselves in good time. Now their task was to save their sons from those follies, that wasted time; to make them realize that ordinary life involves a mass of precautions each one of which calls for self-effacement, renunciation, a sinking of one's own personality in a crowd of others; to make them understand that such life is pleasant enough, is even happy, if they can but contrive to renounce that dangerous form of pride which directs some youths along roads which lead to nowhere, because they think that they have espied, at the ends of these blind alleys, a feeble glimmer of a star, a tiny ray from the sublime.

Life is very different from what children, with their many wild ideas, imagine it to be. The whole of life may be summed up in those looks of despair which men exchange with each other from the age of fifty or sixty onwards, when they meet and see that all of them alike are burdened with disappointments, bitterness, rancour, illness, and having accepted all that, having resigned themselves to the beginnings of decrepitude, irrevocable mistakes, acts of meanness or cowardice concealed in shame, they say to each other, as though in league to do so: "Well, are you all right?" and the other answers, "Oh, yes, all right . . . so-so!" And there you have life, just "so-so" and no better, with nothing fiery or impetuous in it, no lyricism, no loyalty, no pride. Life is a progressive decline, which wears away body and soul; it is an ever-increasing despair, for from maturity onwards we are haunted and obsessed by visions of the inevitable stripping of our flesh; and thenceforward, as the inseparable companions of our solitary hours, we have the hideous spectres of our bodies in dissolution, the phantoms of our former selves as seen before their

time; and life will become, almost continuously, a dialogue, a bargaining with death. It is thoughts of death, maybe, that constitute life, and those thoughts, perhaps, that are ultimately responsible for those fits of emotional disturbance which we regard as an essential part of life.

But it would be giving a false picture to maintain that the fathers of the pupils at the College were thinking on such lines as these on that afternoon of the 18th July, in a hall bedecked with flags, where fine flowers of rhetoric, polished and perfect manners, and plentiful examples of family pride were being displayed to great advantage. It is unlikely that an outlook of life so painfully restricted as that to which we have been referring had troubled them much in the course of their existence, except in the case of two or three fathers who were feeling very much abashed; shabbily dressed and with sadly reduced balances at their banks. These men were doing their best—though but few people were under any illusions about them—to bide the stigma of financial difficulties due to failure in their professions without much chance of recovery therefrom. Having reached the age of fifty or more, these men, whose thoughts were of the gloomiest, who indeed thought too much altogether—as is permissible in the case of those who have neither triumph nor enjoyment to divert them—were feeling that in this august assembly they were all but out of place; that the game was up, not only for themselves but also for that anxious and visibly unhappy child seated in front of them, to whom they would have nothing to leave, and who would be lucky if they could afford to enable him to complete his education.

The other fathers were not thus exercised in mind, and in this they showed both wisdom and politeness; for thus their expressions and general appearance—feeling themselves, as they did, at peace with the world—were suitable to the occasion. This comfortable state of mind was in any case indispensable as an aid to endurance of the terrible heat in the crowded hall, with the thermometer outside showing over eighty degrees in the shade.

If, for example, you had questioned M. Pinoche, the gorgeous millionaire, on the whys and the wherefores of life, you would only have given great amusement to that sturdy, red-faced man, strong as a horse, who, born in a sordid back alley, where his

father patched up old furniture and mended old earthenware crockery, and was possibly not above receiving stolen goods, now took his pleasure in receiving guests in a vast eighteenth-century country house, the main frontage of which overlooked a magnificent park of the French pattern, with distant views of an avenue for riding, a lake and woods. It was evident that M. Pinoche had been born to become a millionaire by his own efforts and to enjoy the luxury of "having his four boys educated by the priests" because, so he declared, "it gives them a good leg-up, whatever you may say." To become a millionaire after beginning life in a state of beggary and rags, through a business of demolitions, to which building was added at exactly the right moment, to say nothing of awards of contracts snatched somewhere behind the scenes (better not ask how!)—all that takes up a man's life and makes it worth living, doesn't it? "I was brought up," M. Pinoche would say proudly, "in the great school of 'Go out in the streets and wangle what you can.' I think I can say I've been a pretty good pupil, can't I? Very well, then, don't come and talk to me of snivellers, gossips, or idle dogs of any kind!" M. Pinoche, a self-made man, during his fifty-four years of life had not devoted five minutes to abstract thinking. He had an unshakable conviction that in the life to come he would still manage to get out of any difficulty, and that it was therefore entirely unnecessary to rack his brains now, before the time came. "But God, Monsieur Pinoche, what about God!" some pious person had once urged. To which M. Pinoche had replied, with his wink of the practised wangler who can get round anybody: "God? Would you like to bet that I shan't fix up something with Him? And that I shall get what I want!"

Doubtless M. Pinoche was a special case, that of a man whose social advancement has occurred too suddenly, and been obtained by rough and probably dishonourable means (there was no definite evidence of this, but much ground for suspicion). It was readily admitted that he had amassed a large fortune and that he possessed the special qualities necessary to the achievement (for which others have striven less successfully), but he was deplorably lacking in the manners appropriate to his income, and his roughness and his shameless impudence were definitely offensive. The

consequence was that there were many people who found it deplorable that a man of his stamp, of such very low origin, should suddenly have become the most important member of polite society in that part of the world. It should be added, however, that these regrets were kept under due restraint and expressed with the utmost caution, and that they did not in the least prevent M. Pinoche's friendship from being greatly sought after, the other fathers present greeting him with eagerness, not to say fervour, in the hope of getting on visiting terms and being invited to the famous country mansion, which was said to be crammed with rare and valuable objects.

There were, however, a few men with pride in their hearts who were anxious to console themselves for their inferiority in the matter of income by stressing their superiority in another sphere. In the presence of M. Pinoche these men displayed a slight touch of haughty reserve, which could have been interpreted thus: "So you are almost one of us now, M. Pinoche, are you not? Just on the point of being received among gentlefolk. But look out, dear Monsieur Pinoche, be very careful! From now onwards there are things you must never say again, things you must never do." M. Pinoche, who was certainly no fool, was fully conscious of this little attitude, of its application to himself and its treacherous import. He made a silent reply to it, in these words: "I know that the lord of the manor I have become started life as a rag-picker. And that's a job that you, my good sirs, would probably have made a failure of, and that's what's irritating you! But my boys, who have begun their lives as sons of a millionaire, are quite likely to be able before long to teach your own a thing or two. The day may come when you'll be only too pleased to push your daughters at 'em." The men of pride were well aware of what M. Pinoche must be thinking, and they did not insist. On the whole they would have been by no means displeased to make friends with the millionaire if only he had shown the slightest inclination to recognize some trifling superiority in themselves, if he had been willing from time to time to ask their advice on a point relating to correct behaviour or good manners. And if necessary they would have been content with very little in these respects. . . . But M. Pinoche, whom wealth had not altered in

the slightest degree, had obviously kept the tastes and habits of the class from which he sprang. Social custom, fine manners, hoity-toity snobs—these could go to hell for all he cared. And he made no bones about saying so; it was a case of take it or leave it. Nevertheless, it was extremely rare for anyone to sheer off: he was commonly supposed to have a fortune of at least fifteen million francs, and some people put it at a good deal more.

And so it was that on that hot, magnificent day, the 18th July 1913, M. Pinoche was the symbol and personification at Sainte-Colline—where he was the centre of attraction, the person at whom everybody stared—of *paterfamilias* at the height of his power, in all his sovereign grandeur, a father whose success is a protection to his sons, removes all obstacles from their path, and opens wide for them the gates which lead to a smoothly flowing and splendid future. A devil of a father, a man who carried all before him, that was what those Pinoche boys had; a father everybody envied. As for M. Pinoche, whose prestige, and the solid possessions in houses and real estate on which it rested, were equally safe and assured; he was far from displeased that one of his sons, Hubert, idler and ne'er-do-well, obstinate and wilful, crafty, cunning, but enterprising and resourceful, should make use of him in order to get the better of everybody. There was something slightly vulgar, strong, and excessively cunning which he had discovered in this boy, and which always delighted him. M. Pinoche was afraid of degeneration in his descendants, that they might lose the boldness, the insolence, the constitution of iron to which he owed his own triumphs. Hubert, the apple of his eye, was the only one of his sons to remind him, feature by feature, of what he himself had been in his early youth, an execrable though dauntless young scamp whom no one could cope with. But, as he grew up, that young scamp had got the better of other people, and now to-day, a trifle apoplectic, greatly increased in weight, but with hair and beard still dark and thick, firm and erect in carriage, wallowing in champagne of the finest vintage years, with a magnificent digestion freely exercised on truffles, *foie gras* and game, always ready with some words of bold chaff for ladies of easy virtue and able to take as mistresses the

loveliest creatures on earth, this former young scapegrace was now a picture of radiant contentment and satisfaction and displaying it in a great religious college, where his sons were rubbing shoulders with boys whose fathers had handles to their names and people were looking at him with astonishment, admiration, and respect—at him, the hard-faced swindler of the demolition business, the profligate dealer in building-plots, and murmuring to each other: “That’s Pinoche, the famous millionaire, the man who bought for a mere song the magnificent historic country house which belonged to the Marquis Gérard de Saint-Archange, the ruined descendant of that great family. A gem of architecture, and the furniture! . . .” And there were some men who were pointing out to their children the former street urchin, now a man of great influence and power, and saying to them: “He started with nothing. See now where you can get to if you work really hard.”

And thus it was that M. Saturnin Pinoche, solid, robust, and beaming with satisfaction, was giving the whole College a double example that day, in the matter of success in life, and of paternity. It was due to this that, with the exception of a few luckless individuals who were worried to death by troubles that could not be put aside, the majority of the men, imitating the millionaire, were putting on airs of importance and self-confidence. Taken as a whole, the different families looked thoroughly good-natured and cheerful, and did honour to the great teaching establishment: the boys who occupied the pupils’ benches at the College were not sons of nobodies.

Among the mothers, the motives for rivalry were quite different. In justice to them it should be recorded that their first impulse—as praiseworthy as any could be—had been to search among the rows of pupils for their own children, and it was this that lay nearest to their hearts. Having at length discovered the boy among a billowing mass of stirring backs and unruly heads of hair, they began by devoting to him several minutes of pure ecstasy, as they murmured the abbreviation of his Christian name, and worried about his looks, which were a guide both to the state of his health and the possibility of his having gained some distinction in his school work, a matter which would shortly determine

whether his father would be angry or pleased; for as wives they were constantly torn between husband and child.

Then, later, these natural feelings retired into the background, and other interests of a more special nature occupied their attention. These ladies began a course of mutual inspection, and in most cases they had not seen each other for a considerable time. Clothes, new jewellery, stoutness, and any signs of increasing age were the objects of their keenest and most earnest attention. The Abbé Fuché's excellent speech was completely wasted on them, and failed to divert them for a single second from the fascinating occupation in which they were engaged. The husbands were also included by these ladies in their review, as they wondered how this or that wife could ever have chosen this or that husband, "a man who would never have meant anything to *me*." They continued to pour out their criticisms, as indefatigable as ants or knitters.

"That poor Mme Nusillon! She's just a wreck—an old crumbling ruin. . . . And fancy dressing in a bright colour with a figure like that. . . ."

"And those silly little flowers show up the colour more than ever! Some women really have got incredibly bad taste!"

"Yes, and there's Mme Mouillave. How frightfully she's gone off! And she's as yellow as a lemon."

"She never was anything to look at, you know. I knew her when she was young. She already had a sort of shrivelled look when she was only twenty. Luckily for her she was rich—dowry of 500,000."

"By the way, did you notice Mme Lardanchois's new diamond?"

"Sham, my dear. A stone of that size, if it was real, would be worth a fabulous sum. The Lardanchois couldn't afford it. People even say that his money affairs are in a—well, from all one hears they're in a rather shaky condition. But the Lardanchois have always swaggered, especially she. When we were both girls and used to meet at dances, she was already a swanker of the worst description. She threw her weight about but hadn't a penny to bless herself with. When her father died, there were debts to be paid off."

"But Lardanchois was quite good family. . . ."

"Odette threw herself at his head. It was positively indecent, the way she went on. She was a great flirt, and she went a long way. . . ."

"The same as Mme Labénisson. Goodness gracious, just look at her, how pale and thin she's got!"

"Oh, she's had an operation lately. Something wrong in her stomach. They took the whole thing away, apparently."

"A sad thing to happen to anybody. A woman's finished, after that."

"She had had lovers, you know."

"Oh well, then. . . . That sort of behaviour always gets punished in the end! But what about Mme Pinoche—there's a woman who wears well."

"But look at the care that's taken of her—with all that money, I ask you! But still she's as common as she could be, poor creature!"

"He married her before he got rich, I believe."

"You've only got to look at her ankles and hands. From a family point of view she's not up to much."

"Still, it was wonderful, what happened to her. Lady of the manor!"

"She pays dearly for it, I can tell you! He's as fast as they make 'em."

"He runs a mistress, so I've been told."

"One, my dear! Several, you mean. And often changing, too."

"As bad as that?"

"But don't you know? Just imagine, that man—I've got it on good authority—that man . . ."

"No!"

"Yes, I tell you . . . shocking things, apparently . . ."

"In that case, as you said, it's a lot to pay for being rich! Much better have a quieter, simpler life, a real family life, like that excellent Mme Garfouillat, for instance."

"Don't you believe it. There was a time when her husband led her a dance. But anyway, I can understand it. If I'd been a man, she would have got on my nerves horribly. Stupid, you wouldn't believe how stupid . . . and pig-headed into the bar-

gain! Personally, I've never known anyone so stupid—except that nice Germaine."

"What, your friend Germaine Dantclot?"

"Yes, the girl who had all sorts of amorous adventures owing to her lack of brains. She simply couldn't protect herself! The mere sight of a uniform bowled her over. But Germaine had freshness about her, fine teeth, a splendid figure. She broke her marriage for the sake of that handsome Guy de Maudresse, the captain of dragoons."

"Who left her in the lurch?"

"Yes, of course. Women couldn't resist him, but he was a bounder all the same. He used to say of her, to anyone who cared to listen: 'People run Germaine down. She is a woman who, in bed, is as clever as you could wish for. Unfortunately the time always comes when you have to drag yourself out.'"

"What happened to her?"

"Well, you won't be surprised to hear that I lost sight of her after scandals like that! I heard that she had started life over again somewhere abroad. I hope it will be a great success. She was very, very upset when Guy de Maudresse took his departure."

"Men are disgusting, you must admit!"

"Oh, I dare say you're right! But I just wonder whether women are much better. They're such ninnies, women are! Anyhow my dear, you know a lot of women. Put yourself in a man's place, and ask yourself how many of them you would like to spend your life with. It's frightful to think of it! Personally, I think men are extremely kind to put up with them. Silly little fools, no taste, making a nuisance of themselves, whining and complaining— that's what most women are. Yes, really, I think there's a very great deal to be said for men."

In the minds of certain of the pupils resignation and anxiety were predominant feelings. Resignation, because there was now nothing more they could do whether they were to win their laurels or not, everything was now definitely settled. This inevitability was in itself a weight off their minds. All form work, written exercises, lessons of any kind were now finished with; school discipline was at an end. Anxiety they had, because in an hour or two, for those who were not to be included in the prize-

list, there would be a stormy settlement of accounts at home. Nusillon, for instance, was saying to himself that he was in some danger of being slaughtered in public. But the situation was less serious for the others. Lamandin was assured in advance of the prize for gymnastics (which pleased his father more than anything), and of a second prize or honourable mention for translation (he had copied from a printed version). With such booty as this he would come off very well.

Quaque, who was not feeling assured of anything, started, as a precaution, a process which would give him violent indigestion, in order to make himself just sufficiently ill for his purpose. The beginnings of indigestion made him turn pale in a way which completely upset Mme Quaque. Now whenever Mme Quaque took it into her head to have an opinion, particularly one on her boy's health, M. Quaque, a gloomy and submissive person, never ventured to have a different one of his own. Moreover, when at home Quaque was in the habit of relating how he suffered from severe headaches at the College, which had led Mme Quaque to suppose that these indispositions were due to "all that teaching they give those children, all those things they stuff their heads with, as if there was any sense in it, I ask you!" She would then add, addressing M. Quaque with vehemence, "For all the good it has done you, being well educated!" It should be explained that M. Quaque, who had been a remarkable pupil in his day, had secured throughout his life only poor appointments and insecure positions. Ever since he had obtained his doctor's degree in law, as though he had consumed all his strength in examinations and the writing of theses, he had become like a man who is half-asleep, and had steadily maintained that attitude. Under cover of this, M. Quaque was accustomed to declare that the secret of happiness is to have but few wants. To which Mme Quaque, transposing this maxim, with its touch of Stoic philosophy, from the key of material needs to that of love and passion, replied vigorously: "That is a lesson, Jules, which you have no need to give to a poor unhappy woman who has had to be content with you! Heaven knows that's little enough . . ." It will be easily understood that M. Quaque, with his defences breached on this delicate topic, became more shrivelled up and bewildered than

ever. From this condition he only emerged when expressly called upon to do so by Mme Quaque, who said to him ten times a day: "Look at you, Jules, never opening your mouth. Why don't you say something?" M. Quaque would then proffer some tentative opinion. That was enough for Mme Quaque; having now obtained material for contradiction, she would plunge into a shrill, unbridled, and revengeful speech. This spirit of contradiction delighted Quaque the younger, for this reason. One day when his father had strayed from the narrow path of humility and got above himself, he declared, having himself once been a successful pupil, that boys should work at school, work when they are young; and the effect of this had been to inspire Mme Quaque with contempt, which she expressed in no uncertain terms, for the teaching at the College. This result of the argument just suited Quaque, but he was continually afraid that the situation might become reversed. He feared lest M. Quaque should come to agree that children were in fact overworked, and that the contents of school manuals were not, on the whole, of great importance so far as the future was concerned. If this should happen, Mme Quaque would take the opposite point of view, and in order to score off that fool of a husband that she had, would want her son always to come out top. With this dire possibility in mind, Quaque would often say to himself: "If only the pater doesn't go and make an ass of himself."

Lhumilié's case was always the same, and presented no problems: his name would not be mentioned. It pained the boy that this should be so, for it meant grief to his parents. Though it was always the same grief, he could not get used to the idea of distressing those good people. But poor Lhumilié always had incredibly bad luck. Whenever there was any sort of privilege to be obtained, he inevitably got left out. There was no reason for this except that he himself was scatterbrained and thoughtless. To hustle anybody else in order to get something for himself was repugnant to him. For the rough and tumble of life we need a minimum of pride and of toughness; but in these qualities he was entirely lacking. The only things he cared for were friendship, doing service to others, and having happy people around him. With the lowest place, the humblest position, he was completely

satisfied. By occupying it himself, he saved a friend from doing so; moreover, that place had this advantage, that it was retained with no difficulty whatever, that he had not got to be constantly fighting either to advance or to avoid retreat. In the same way, in the case of a collective misdemeanour it seemed quite natural to him that the first name that occurred to the master in charge should be his own. On many occasions this was unjustified, and he was all for the principle of loud cries of indignation. But in his innermost heart he did not really mind. Punishments were merely a matter of getting used to them. If you get punished often enough for your pals, they end by being under an obligation to you. And Lhumilié was in fact rewarded for all this. Thinner and gawkier than any boy you could imagine, he was perpetually suffering from hunger. In exchange for substantial nourishment he agreed as a general rule to his own denunciation and underwent punishments which should never have been given to him; but he endured them with his mouth full, and this procured him a maximum of satisfaction.

It was unfortunate that things were going so badly at this end of the school year. Lhumilié realized that this was so directly he saw his father, a man of precision and punctuality, who held a position of authority in a large firm of ecclesiastical goldsmiths and silversmiths. M. Lhumilié would have liked his only son to work seriously and well, and to induce him to do so would have been glad enough to punish him pretty severely. But to give sorrow to Lhumilié in whom remorse and grief were an immediate cause of some abominable howling would be to meet domestic troubles half-way, troubles which would make the house uninhabitable. Now M. Lhumilié, a very learned student of philately, liked nothing so much as to put on his slippers, arm himself with a magnifying glass, a pair of scissors, glue, gummed paper, and immerse himself in his passion. For the purpose of identifying rare examples of Bolivia and Peru he needed absolute silence throughout his house. With him, his love for his collection of stamps outweighed the cares of paternal responsibility. In order to safeguard the pure joy of his nightly labours, he allowed his son to go about giggling inanely and frittering away his time. All this meant that Lhumilié was running no great risks in returning

home without a prize. But he suffered occasionally when he saw his father making wry faces from vexation. For young Lhumilié's heart was in the right place.

Anxiety reigned likewise in the hearts of many of the boys for whom the reading of the prize-list would be a formidable ordeal, before an assembly of parents in their smartest clothes, all of whom were anxious that their family should be honoured, that their offspring's name should be read out to an accompaniment of applause, and the boy thus take his place among the most intelligent in the establishment. The brilliance of that colourful and stately occasion could not fail to be tarnished by some disappointments. A short time hence there would be families with feelings devastated by a public display of a certain inferiority in their own kith and kin, which would be having to take in charge a boy with neither laurel wreath nor books with gilt-edged leaves; and then, clearing a way for themselves through a procession of beaming laureates, bending beneath the weight of their wisdom and their knowledge, these same families, covered with shame, would be leading to the station, making their way thither by side streets, the sorry little empty-handed dunce whom they had brought into the world. It seemed certain that during this painful little journey there would be fierce and resounding paternal wrath. There was every prospect of bitter reproaches, threats, cuffs and blows. . . . A few outcasts, to whom welcome embraces would certainly be denied, as they awaited the conclusion of this fine gathering were somewhat ill at ease. These were trying to summon up sufficient courage to face their parents, while saying to themselves that after all, this distressing reunion with them was but a prelude to the holidays.

In the meantime the Abbé Fuche was continuing with the reading of his discourse:

“‘Of what each of us owes to others,’ I said. Yes, it does seem to me to be very true that our obligations are reciprocal. As for you, my dear children, who, taking you as a whole, have given very great satisfaction to your masters, I should like to thank you for having provided them with opportunities for the exercise of patience and devotion for which in due time they will be re-

warded an hundredfold. To give you instruction—there is little in that, and others would perform that task successfully enough, were it only a question of giving you teaching in the various branches of human knowledge. But here, in this establishment, as you will know, there is something else, something far removed from such knowledge, that is at stake. ‘For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ Nothing that is perishable—and all that we see around us is that—should be our supreme aim and object, our final goal. For the most part, doubtless, we shape and fashion you for the things of this world; doubtless, in our desire to take into full consideration all the exigencies of the secular life, our intention is to enable you to have an honourable, indeed a brilliant career in the life that lies before you. But beware! It is not this that matters most, that matters supremely. For the very reason that you are destined by your good birth to live in a stratum of society in which everything framed for your destruction lies hidden behind a fair and plausible exterior, you must be ever on your guard, remembering that you will be more exposed than others to the gravest of all perils, the only peril which of a truth is deadly—that of losing your own soul. At this point I am addressing myself more particularly to the eight bachelors of philosophy who will presently be leaving us for good and all. To them I shall say, as I have to their predecessors: ‘Our good wishes go with you. But do not forget that this life to which your youth has been looking forward with such eagerness is but a hard and difficult period which is to lead you to the Promised Land. Everything will smile upon you, and imposture and deceit, wearing a mask of friendliness, may often cross your path. Say to yourselves, and say it constantly, that there is one thing that counts and one thing only, beside which all else is vanity, deception, dust: ‘not to lose your own soul.’”

“That, my dear children, is the reason why, in this house where you receive your teaching—teaching which is as good and thorough as in other establishments—something is done which would not be done anywhere else. That something calls for self-denial and for faith which could hardly be expected of men who take payment for teaching. The salaries of your masters are not reckoned in terms of money. Their labours are recorded in a

book that is not for inspection here below. For our most cherished ambition, my dear children, is to make you learned in faith and Christian charity. It is to see you add to the grand total of believers who diffuse over the face of the earth the bright rays of an unchanging hope. It is that you should join the ranks of men of good will to whom has been promised a precious share of God's everlasting mercy. And thus it is that our teaching has a double aim: to arm you for worldly strife, but to arm you in such manner that the victories which you will assuredly win shall not end in irreparable defeat in those matters which relate to your eternal salvation. For us, education is not a business; it is a faith. It is a contribution, as liberal as our means and our strength can make it, to the apotheosis of those truths which are Life itself, that life triumphant into which we shall arise at the Last Day."

"Quite eloquent!" M. Arthur Durand, father of Joannes Durand, a pupil of the fifth form, whispered in the ear of M. Nestor Patrigot, father of Frédéric Patrigot, a pupil of the fourth, "but a bit stern, perhaps. . . ."

"Yes . . . and especially at a prize-giving. That's a day that should be gay and cheerful. Death, you know . . ."

"There's always plenty of time to think about that."

"It's their great stunt, death is! They overdo it a bit."

"On the other hand, if there were not death . . ."

"Ah, yes . . . quite so . . . if there weren't death . . ."

"Are you a great churchgoer, Monsieur Patrigot?"

"Not exactly, Monsieur Durand. But I'm all for religion. It's a good thing, religion is, no one could deny that."

"That is what I always say. And for children, too, it's better that they should have it as part of their education. It's a question of their good behaviour."

"Their good behaviour, yes. It leaves its mark, whatever anyone may say. Then there's this, too, that we parents can feel we have done our duty thoroughly. We can say, 'Yes, the children have had their baptism, first Communion . . . If anything should happen to them . . .'"

"You would have nothing to reproach yourself for. And later on—well, they can choose for themselves."

"Everyone is free to do that, certainly. . . . You believe in God, Monsieur Durand?"

"Oh, most assuredly I do. Yes, yes, I believe in God."

"So do I. God's existence explains lots of things!"

"What you mean is, almost everything."

"We have to acknowledge the fact that the world can hardly be explained in any other way."

"Why are we here? What are we doing? We have no idea at all. Well, it is comforting to be able to say to ourselves that somebody knows it for us!"

"I entirely agree with you, Monsieur Durand! Of course, God as I see Him isn't quite the same as the curés' God. And the same way for the Redemption, the Holy Trinity, and all the rest of it, if you understand me. I think of Him as having more gumption, a God who understands things better, the things that have to happen in life, certain little peccadilloes. A God, for instance, who wouldn't pitch into you because you'd had a beef-steak on a Friday, or even (*in his ear, very softly*) for a little lapse from conjugal fidelity, a trifle that's over and done with at once."

"Mine is exactly the same, Monsieur Patrigot. What I really believe in is one God in two persons: a God for the curés, and a God for laymen. A God who will judge differently, according to which it is. That's only just and right, don't you think so?"

"But of course I do!"

"The curés have got much better facilities, anyway."

"You bet they have. Why, it's all they've got to think about."

"They are necessary, though. Don't forget that."

"Yes, yes, they're necessary."

"I respect them."

"I respect them and back them up too, like yourself."

"So long as they don't interfere, and go outside their job."

"Yes, you're absolutely right!"

"Still, everyone can't become a curé. What would happen to the women?"

"They would have to become nuns, the whole lot of 'em, and if that happened, what about the children?"

"The world would come to an end. It would die of consumption, slowly and gradually. God has never meant that to happen."

"No, and what proves it is that the whole of the Apocalypse would have to go by the board!"

"When I come to think of it more carefully, it seems to me that the curés are in an ever so much better position than we are, for all this business about heaven."

"And just think, they have no wives or children, no servants, no encumbrances of any kind. . . . There you have a body of men who have never had to bother about bills or expenses. Do they even pay taxes?"

"I really don't know. And anyway, where do they get money from? As you say, take it by and large, their life is a pretty self-centred one."

"They do good, we have to remember that."

"They're a help to people in distress, that's quite certain. Some of them are most devoted men."

"I should be the last person to deny it. Still, why not say it straight out: it's their job."

"Oh, yes, it's their job! An honourable one, too. . . ."

"Indeed it is! But it carries no risks with it. Don't you agree?"

"Absolutely! That is why I stick to my idea: a God for curés and a God for laymen. It seems to me only fair that God should expect more from His priests, who have only got Him to think about, than from poor devils like ourselves, who are never left for long in peace."

"That's what I think too. I have always thought that God will be much more accommodating for us than we are allowed to be told. I've got a feeling that way."

"And I should like to know what reasons He could have for being so down on us? We are much more to be pitied than blamed. When you look at life and see how little it gives us, when all's said and done. . . ."

"Far more worry than pleasure, that's dead certain. Are you spending your holidays in Brittany again, this year?"

"Yes, I expect so. Are you going to the Pyrenees again?"

"I've got connections there, through my wife. It makes a reason for going. . . ."

"Before I go on," the Abbé Fuche was saying now, "I should like also to thank your dear parents, and in so doing, to make you boys feel how much affection you owe them, how greatly heaven has blessed you in giving you your birth into such excellent families, whose high standards of morality bring to this nation of ours, this elder and favourite daughter of the Church, that spiritual superiority which gives our great and noble country its unique standing in the world. On a day like this, when we are gathered together to recognize and pay tribute to merit, I should be failing in my most elementary duty if I omitted to point out, as eminently deserving of the gratitude of us all, first your mothers, whose tender care brings happiness to your boyhood's years, and then your fathers, whose names shine with the bright lustre shed by professional distinction and worth, when, as in their case, that worth is seen in conjunction with an integrity of purpose that is universally acknowledged. That which above all is a source of honour and pride for this College is the fact that your names, my dear children, are spotless and undefiled. The education which we give you is directed precisely to this end—that those revered names may be borne by you throughout your lives as you have received them from your parents, with the halo of esteem by which each one of them is encircled."

"He's a fine speaker, I must say," M. Patrigot said to M. Durand as soon as the applause had somewhat subsided.

"Yes," said M. Durand, "to drop the subject of death and get to that, was a pretty good effort. I could never have believed he would recover himself so well."

"He's a tough fellow, that priest," M. Pinoche was saying to the Baron de Lamolette. "What a salesman he would have made, in business!"

"My dear friend," the Baron replied, "only men of first-class intelligence are picked for running these great colleges. He must be a priest of good family. You are sure he wasn't born a *de Fuche*, or Fuche something or other?"

M. Pinoche and the Baron de Lamolette, who were country

neighbours, had become very intimate friends ever since the Baron's sons had joined the Pinoche boys at Sainte-Colline. This intimacy was further explained by certain circumstances which were unknown to anyone but themselves. For a dozen years past there had been a very serious falling-off in the Baron's revenues owing to depredations wrought by a racing-stable and a music-hall singer. In order to retrieve his losses, the Baron plunged into the breeding of horned cattle, and other agricultural schemes presumed to yield high returns. He believed himself to be the possessor of fresh and clever ideas in these matters, and he treated the peasants as though they were behind the times. These experiments proved even more costly than the horses and the singer. He drifted helplessly in constant difficulties over money, which included bills of exchange far too often renewed—until he met M. Pinoche. He had just borrowed from him, on several different occasions, considerable sums of money, with the ease and lack of compunction of the old nobleman who thinks that he is honouring riff-raff by giving it a share in the danger of his own downfall, which in this case appeared inevitable. But M. Pinoche was not a man to risk his money on the security of a family tree. He was well able to obtain information, and knew his debtor's circumstances in every detail. Indeed, he knew them infinitely better than the Baron himself, and had none of the latter's illusions about them. The Baron was owner of great estates which were heavily mortgaged; they would soon be ripe for the plucking, and could not escape a capitalist able to buy them in the lump. M. Pinoche, knowing that his hour would come, was in the meantime losing nothing by being seen in public on familiar terms with the Baron. This new association led to his being a visitor at several large country houses in the district, rich in old furniture, silver plate, china, and other *objets d'art*. There were occasional chances of picking things up cheaply, for cash down. M. Pinoche was arriving at the final stages of his collections: this, in his eyes, completed his consecration.

The reading of the prize-list had now been reached. The same names, greeted each time with applause, occurred with terrible regularity. Terrible, because it was leaving no hope of a mention

for those boys who were in sore need of hearing their names read out and thus being enabled to turn round to where their families were sitting and cast a happy glance in their direction, which would be answered by another of tender pride. A few parents there were who asked nothing more than that their honour should be saved, and would have needed but little to satisfy them. But even that little proved too much, for the prize-list was as relentless as the balance sheet which tells the shareholders the story of their ruin.

The same names were recurring and the same pupils, beaming with joy, were slowly mounting the steps which led to the platform, under the gaze of an admiring audience. Then, accompanied by a priest who carried their trophies, they came down again to be crowned by a master of their choice, by their mother, or by their father. The person chosen embraced the laureate after placing on his head the paper laurels, emblems of victory won by talent at an early age.

Around all the good pupils there was a great stirring of curiosity, and as they passed they were followed by a gentle murmur of compliments and flattering appreciation which might well have turned their heads. People were bending forward to glimpse, if they could, upon their foreheads that bright aura of distinction which marks the youth with special gifts, those who march unhindered to the attainment of good appointments, a good reputation, fine marriages, prosperous establishments, and honours; those who a few years hence would be leaving the great schools of France after reaching the highest places in them, those schools which issue certificates of ability of the highest order, high diplomas whose inscription on parchment guarantees their importance, documents whose seal is a hallmark of professional freemasonry, and which themselves attest an intelligence that shows no dangerous departure from orthodoxy and is thus deemed worthy of reward. People were feeling that this fine flower of good pupils, with the incoherent emotions of childhood already outgrown, with their minds already concentrated on definite aims of recognized public utility, would one day be sharing the responsibility for the future of a great country which, for the management and control of its own destiny, has need of men

who inspire confidence, who are immune from the temptation to make dangerous innovations, and whose qualities are exclusively of the old and well-known pattern.

Doubtless Renaudier, who was carrying off the principal prizes for philosophy, looked a frightful little pedant, with a detestably affected manner, and all the manifestations of a cold, unemotional detachment horrible to note in a boy of seventeen. Doubtless Noel Cacia, who was collecting nearly all the laurels for rhetoric (except those which Dominique Issartier, in a lazy, offhand sort of way, had taken the trouble to annex for himself, with a lordly contempt for baubles of such negligible value), was a lout, with something grotesque about him, always grinning and making faces (but in any case Noel Cacia, who was suspected of wild ideas and mental insubordination, was not included by his masters in the category of good pupils). Doubtless Vachette, a bright particular star of the second form, displayed the features of an idiot with abnormally short sight, wholly absorbed by his routine. Doubtless also, Bedouillet, the paragon of the sixth, bore on his mean and sickly little face the stigmata of a repulsive hypocrisy. Doubtless, had one taken the trouble to watch them, there would have been some young rascals in whom one would have discerned more amiability, more natural grace, more unconscious attractiveness. In certain of those boys there was nothing, down to their thick-headedness and their mulish obstinacy, the fearless gleam in their bright, roguish eyes, and their bold and shameless impudence, that did not reveal a daring, courageous nature well adapted to rash or to glorious undertakings. There was something touching in their lack of forethought, in their unreflecting enthusiasm. One might perhaps have found in them, had one but searched, strong tendencies to open-heartedness and sincerity, and capabilities worthy of attention; and perhaps also a few exceptional beings, an enigma even to themselves. But the system did nothing to aid research in these difficult matters; and it may well have been that a precious store of fine feelings, a wealth of signal gifts, were thus allowed to lie fallow, to be left untouched in their abundance. The masters turned more readily to soil that was easier to cultivate. It was the average and ordinary pupil on whose education attention was chiefly concentrated.

It was for these reasons that the parents of the outstanding pupils with their multiple laurel wreaths were casting at their neighbours looks of arrogant and haughty pride; for they were feeling that their children's attainments were an indisputable, shining proof of their own high merits. Heaven would not accord the blessing of glorious fruit to an unworthy womb, and the father's great abilities alone could account for the brilliance of the son. But the other parents, who had turned with surprise and envy to these, who looked at first sight so astonishingly ordinary and dull, were asking themselves by what mysterious graftings, by what remote ancestral process, working in secret down the years, such people as they, so plain, so undistinguished, could ever have become the parents of these wondrous boys. And the privileged parents, who were too obviously allowing their excitement to run away with them, were a bad example for the ordinary parents. There were certain boys who would shortly be getting the backwash of the latter's vexation and annoyance.

There were, however, among the mothers certain women of good sense whom the vanity of intellectual success left quite unmoved. And thus it was that Mme Gamache, whose son was a frightful little plebeian in the world of knowledge, bent over to Mme Chachuat, whose own boy was very little better, and whispered to her:

"What matters most at their age is their health. The important thing is to turn these children into happy and healthy little animals. Happiness is everything, where they are concerned! It will make the whole difference to their lives, later on."

"You are perfectly right," Mme Chachuat declared. "And what is it that is so important in life, for boys? To be able to shift for themselves! The first thing they need for that is good health. That's the best equipment we could ever give them."

"That is what I am always saying to my husband, who wants this and wants that—just a man's ideas! But I would rather have my son bottom of the class and well, than top and seedy. Or with some physical defect, like some boys I see here."

"I'm exactly the same! See my little Pierrot over there, how well he looks. What splendid cheeks!"

"And my Jacques—do you see him? Just to the right of that

skinny little boy who looks all yellow, and got all the prizes in his form. Look at mine beside him, and see what a contrast!"

"To overwork them so that they get consumption when they're eighteen. No, thank you!"

"I should be too frightened altogether! My boy, when I see him too quiet . . . Look here, now, if he stays too long without making his sister howl, I feel certain he's not well. If I had a child that was too good I should never stop worrying."

"Yes, and those children that are too good are sly and hypocritical, often . . ."

"It isn't natural, good behaviour, with all that vitality they've got to find an outlet for."

"Then for heaven's sake let them be little fools, the poor darlings! It won't last for ever."

"Yes, and let them make the most of it, too. That's what I say when mine is making my head split."

Not far from these ladies sat Mme Garfouillat with her daughter Hélène, who had lately returned from Paris and was in active communication with young Gérard Duparc, whom she expected shortly to marry. She had already told her mother in confidence of this hope. But that lady was indulging for the moment in lamentations:

"And there is Zido with nothing at all, Hélène! Not even an honourable mention. His father won't be at all pleased about it. What's to be done, Hélène?"

"Oh well, mother, father won't eat him up! And anyway Zido is too small and thin. If only they would try and make him a bit stronger before stuffing his head with Latin and Greek."

"Well, Hélène, in my opinion it's constipation that is hindering his development and paralysing his intelligence. It makes an accumulation of bad gases inside you, you understand? I'm sure he doesn't go to the lavatory regularly every day."

"Oh, mother, really! . . ."

"You'll see, Hélène, you'll soon be seeing how important all this is—you're practically engaged now, and as my poor mother used to say, and she brought up nine children: 'Good appetite, good work, a good conscience and a good temper—it's all a matter of the stomach.' If the child looks ill, if he doesn't work

. . . I'm sure Zido doesn't do his duty every day, and nothing will ever persuade me to the contrary."

"You've said that already, mother!"

"It must be done every day, Hélène, and every day you must attend to it, too. You'll see that I'm right, my child. Yes, you will."

"All right, mother, I understand!"

"For a woman with children it's her first duty."

"I know, I know!"

"What astonishes me is that the Fathers here . . . priests who have been so highly educated . . . well, they ought to know. . . . I am sure that piety—yes, even piety itself must be affected by constipation."

"Oh, mother, that's enough, please, please. . . ."

"But I mean it, Hélène! How can you say your prayers comfortably . . ."

"Do you know," said Hélène Garfouillet, her patience now exhausted, "I shall be thankful to get away from home. And I hope it will be soon!"

There were two surprises in the course of this ceremony, and two only. But they were considerable ones.

In the first place, Pinoche, the famous Hubert Pinoche, whose fame was of the sad and sorry order, prince of dunces and hidden leader of conspirators, was awarded the first prize for history in the fourth form. A remarkable feature in the case, and an indication of circumstances quite out of the ordinary, was that the Superior himself made the following comment on this award: "Pinoche's paper disclosed a knowledge of history which would have been highly creditable had he been a pupil in rhetoric."

And thus it was that Pinoche, at the close of the school year, had suddenly made up his mind to burn his boats. What was the reason for this abrupt decision? He had expressed it to himself in these words—"I'll show them a thing or two, these idiots!" It would not be easy to determine exactly to what category this word "idiot" was intended to apply. However, as we know our Pinoche, there is at least one individual at Sainte-Colline whom we may quite safely include among the objects of his contempt,

to wit, the Abbé Menème, to whom this good-for-nothing pupil had never in his life given in an exercise nor repeated a history lesson. But it was precisely the Abbé Menème, an abbé red in the face from vexation and wrath—so keenly conscious was he of the ludicrousness of the situation—who was chosen by Piffoche to crown him in public. He set much store on wreaking this final vengeance on the man who had once slapped his face over a little matter in which St Joseph had been involved. That was an insult which Pinoche had never been able to pocket.

Nusillon's name was also read out. He obtained a second prize and an honourable mention, an experience entirely new to him. When he was on the platform, where it seemed incredible that he should ever be at all, he was asked by whom he wished to be crowned. He named Father Bricole, which caused great astonishment, and even concern: people were a little scandalized by it. For this there were two reasons. First, it was not at all good form to wish to be crowned by the remote and insignificant Father Bricole, who remained always entirely apart from that interplay of politeness and good manners on which the relations between the masters and the pupils' families, the College and the outside world, were based. Secondly, with his desperate determination to avoid all smart and brilliant gatherings, it was more than probable that Father Bricole, to whom no one gave a thought, was not in the hall. And there could be no question of sending anyone to find the old priest simply in order that he should come and give the accolade to a badly dressed ragamuffin like Nusillon, with his shabby uniform which he had already outgrown.

But Nusillon insisted, saying that Father Bricole was not far away, that he had seen him. And the old priest was in fact discovered behind a wing of the scenery. He had smartened himself up, and his kindly face was radiant with joy. As he placed the crown on Nusillon's forehead, his rough old hand was trembling. He clasped the boy in his arms.

"Thank you, Father Bricole," Nusillon said.

"How glad I am!" said Father Bricole. "You see, Nusillon, I was right when I told you that God . . ."

"I've got you to thank for it, Father Bricole," Nusillon said. "You're like God to me."

"Well, if you think so, Nusillon," said Father Bricole. "But it comes to the same thing, as He has made use of me!"

When Mme Nusillon saw her Hector with his forehead encircled in its laurel wreath she was delighted beyond measure, though her joy was not unmixed with fear: with a man like M. Nusillon one could never tell how things would turn out. She said to him tentatively, in a voice filled with emotion:

"You see, Alfred, he has kept his promise. He has worked better this year. Tell him you are pleased with him."

But his reasons for displeasure were things that M. Nusillon valued highly. He was positively proud of the calamities of which, to hear him talk, you would have thought his life was compounded. For the past fifteen years this head of a family had been representing himself as a man who, both as husband and father, was overwhelmed by adversity. With the bitter smile of those who are relentlessly pursued by hostile fate, he would hint that these misfortunes were his expiation of the stupid misalliance which he had once made from sheer generosity and greatness of heart. Of all the fine qualities which he claimed for himself, the one by which he set the greatest store was the valiance of his struggle against the injustice of Fate. Towing behind him two beings completely benumbed by the terror he inspired, M. Nusillon was constantly playing the part of a man who is wholly misunderstood, and permanently fettered by a wretched specimen of a family in the ruthless conflict in which he was engaged. He had no wish whatever to lose this halo.

"You are easily pleased, you poor creature!" he replied. "A wretched little second prize. . . . When I was Hector's age I was top of my form! And I want to see him drop that imbecile expression of his—that son of yours! Doing better work seems to suit him even less than idiocy did, I declare."

The fact was that Hector's success was threatening the validity of the most immovable item in the whole of the family creed; the amply proven inferiority of the Mortifioux strain. The father had always and consistently proclaimed that his son was a hundred per cent Mortifioux, and that no good was to be expected from the boy. M. Nusillon would never admit that he

had made a mistake on this cardinal point. However, as he grumbled and growled, and turned a cross-grained profile to certain demonstrations of filial affection, he said:

"Come on then, don't look so flurried and give me a kiss! So you've managed to get out of your box on the ears this time!"

It was a form of certificate of satisfaction given, and was conceded with a bad grace. Though he would never admit it, M. Nusillon was feeling vexed at being thus deprived of a justifiable motive for his bad temper, and at the temporary removal of a Spartan father's chief prerogative—the right of resort to vigorous corporal chastisement. As he looked at his son's cheeks, his right hand was seized with an itch and a longing so violent that the whole of his forearm was quickly affected. He was bent on reserving for the future certain causes of complaint, based on equitable principles to be stated well in advance:

"But you won't always get off as cheaply as this, my boy. You'll have to come out top sometimes, now. That's a warning for next year!"

Next year was a long way off, Nusillon said to himself. But his father did exactly the same thing; and he added:

"In the meantime I shall be keeping an eye on your holiday tasks."

Nusillon, a pitiful little figure in its laurel wreath, had visions of a long succession of summer days in which the thunder and lightning of many a storm loomed black upon the horizon.

Immediately after he had crowned Nusillon, Father Bricole had stolen gently out of the entertainment hall. He was labouring under a stress of emotion, a wave of happiness almost greater than he could bear. With the utmost haste he returned to the only spot on the face of the earth in which he did not feel out of his element, his small hut in which he mended and patched and gave comfort and consolation, the little hovel, cluttered up with a multitude of objects, in which, from the morning bell till that of evening, he spent his days with work that never for an instant ceased. And there a sudden feeling of sadness overcame him, because the school year was coming to an end; because he would not be hearing from time to time the tapping of a small ink-

stained finger against his window, like the beak of some stray bird benumbed with cold and driven by winter's desolation to beg some crumbs of bread and a little heartening warmth; and because, in that poor little shanty of his, he would no longer be getting the sweet aroma that came from those young urchins' hearts when they went to him to tell him of their woes—those young hearts that were sweeter to him and dearer than all others, and whose boyish, touching secrets he knew so well.

Then, almost unconsciously, he took a plank, a beautiful smooth plank with prettily veined wood, and passed his hand over it. And once again a wave of joy flooded his whole being, because it was a good, docile piece of wood, obedient to the plane. A man who knows his job, a man filled with understanding and love of wood, could do anything he liked with that piece. Next it occurred to him that the minds of children might be compared with the surface of soft wood, still in the rough, which a clever and patient craftsman can prepare to his liking. Neither the architect nor the engineer makes beams, or framework, or wainscoting, or furniture. For these, workers of a humbler kind are needed, men who from long daily contact with this particular substance have discovered its resources. And in the same way, those engaged in education whose ambition it is to produce the material for societies of a certain pattern, too often fail to make a sufficient study of character, feelings, or intelligence.

It gladdened Father Bricole's heart to feel that he understood these things, these seemly and honourable, these fundamental things. He prayed to his "dear kind Heavenly Father" to fill the minds of many others with these thoughts, for if such ideas became more widespread than at present, they must make small boys less unhappy, must make them better, and thereby the whole world would become a better place, that world of ours that may yet attain perfection, the world of to-morrow, the world of future years.

And now the time had come when the College would be deserted for the space of three months. The boys had bidden farewell to their masters, their families had taken leave of the Superior, the Bursar, and the Vice-Principal. The crowd of people which was slowly descending the staircases would be

passing through the courtyard and thence into the street, and so to the station. A confused, muffled undercurrent of sound told Father Bricole what was happening. He was waiting for the deep silence of the empty months to spread its pall over the College bereft of humanity, that deep silence which rent his heart.

At that moment he heard the sound of a helter-skelter of rushing feet along the pathway. The door was suddenly unlatched, and three panting youngsters made their appearance. They were Pinoche, Nusillon, and Lhumilié. There was a chorus of exclamations.

"We came along as quickly as we could to say good-bye to you, Father Bricole! See you next year, Father Bricole! Enjoy your holidays, Father Bricole! You know we like you awfully, Father Bricole!"

Having thus delivered themselves, loudly and with the utmost enthusiasm, they rushed off to rejoin their parents. Father Bricole was left standing alone by his bench, buried in thought. Pupils by the hundred he had seen come and go, for many a past year. And always—yes, always—those who at the hour of departure had remembered him and made some charming little gesture of recognition and gratitude had been the same kind of boys, young scamps like those three. The others, the good pupils, children well-behaved and duly rewarded, had not even a glance to spare for a Father Bricole who seemed somehow or other as though he were one of the servants at the College. Those clever boys had already come to understand that in this life one must seek the society of those whom it is an advantage or an honour to know, and shun the goodwill, which can only compromise one's dignity, of all common people.

It is quite certain that Father Bricole had no complaint to make of this disdainful treatment. He was happy in his attitude of humility which he himself had freely chosen, knowing full well that it was only to the downtrodden and oppressed that his friendship could bring some little help and consolation. This did not prevent him from having real insight into children's minds—from judging them in his own way. The conclusions he derived from his own method were exactly the opposite of those which the official method yielded; and this was why, at the termination

of another school year which had brought two hundred boys nearer to their destinies as grown men, he was asking himself once more the question—who is right and who is wrong? He would not allow himself to be either uncompromising or vain, and so far as the system was concerned he was certainly no rebel. But he would have liked the system to be extended and revised, for he believed it to be responsible for a number of mistakes; when, for example—on its authority—decisions were made that this or that child was “good” or “bad.” The case of the latter, the only one that interested the old priest, had been insufficiently investigated. Could anyone, judging merely by what he sees on the surface, really maintain that children who are turbulent and wild because they are spontaneous and full of life, are therefore “bad”? Was Nusion bad, was Lhumilić bad, or even Pinoche? Father Bricole smiled. And he murmured to himself:

“With those jolly little faces? With that hearty, happy laugh of theirs? Surely, surely not!”

And he bent to his planing